CYCLE SPORT MAGAZINE

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- Bernard Hinault 30 years on from France's last win

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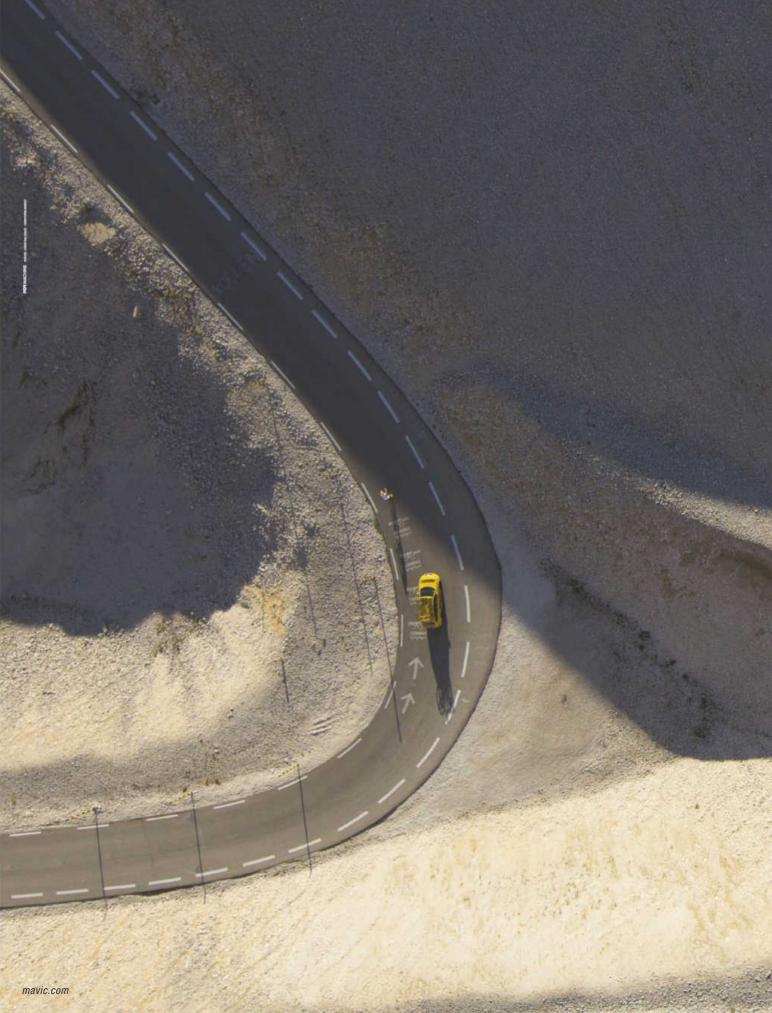
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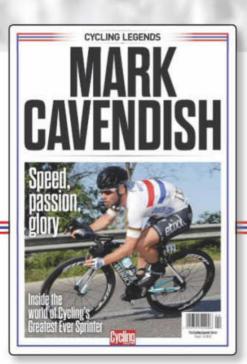
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Editorial

Not just a little spat



've never spat in anyone's face, and I struggle to comprehend why anyone would do such a thing. It's a disgusting and cowardly act that no one deserves to be on the receiving end of, least of all the person leading the biggest annual sporting event in the world.

What that fan (for want of a better word) did to Chris Froome on the climb of La Toussuire sadly leads me to question the very essence and attraction of the sport.

The fans on the roadside, and their proximity to the riders, is what makes pro bike racing so special. I once stood on the side of the road in the mountains at the Tour de France as a young fan as the riders passed just inches from me and it took my breath away. It's something all cycling fans, young or old, should experience once in their lifetime.

No one wants whole routes lined with barriers (and no one could afford it anyway), and neither do we want all races to look like the Tour of Oman. So is there any way to avoid the abuse that Team Sky faced this year? In 12 months' time, will they really have to put up with more of

Simon Richardson Acting Editor





TOUR DE









TOUR DE FRANCE 2015

Adam Hansen celebrates his 12th consecutive Grand Tour with a cold beer on Alpe d'Huez



Tour hotel horrors

The Tour is notorious for its dodgy hotels, with no rider seemingly escaping a nightmare of a night when at the race

Richard Abraham

hether it's sleeping three to a room in a boiling hot cell on a rest day in Gap, conducting an impromptu ecology lesson on the various forms of invertebrate life residing in a mattress, or dealing with bitter hoteliers who look ready to spit into your spaghetti if you ask for seconds: every Tour de France rider has their own hotel horror story.

Indeed, pros have had to get good at putting up with the pitfalls of life on the road — Britain's first Tour de France stage winner Brian Robinson recently described a good Tour in the 1950s as one where you didn't have to go home with dysentery.

"There was one hotel in the centre of France that we stayed in during one Tour. I had a cockroach in my bed, the room smelt of disinfectant, and to get my suitcase to fit in, I had to move the furniture out," recalls Charly Wegelius, now a DS with Cannondale-Garmin.

"About midnight the police came to break up an argument between the owner and his wife, and the nightclub nextdoor was playing music loudly until a rather unsociable hour."

To this day, Tour riders can't ever rely on getting a good night's sleep. The poor standard of accommodation became a real talking point of this year's race and a bête noire for teams looking to improve performances with proper rest.

"We had one night in the second week where there was no air conditioning, and it was just too hot," described Giant-Alpecin's Albert Timmer. "Some of us got into the swimming pool the following morning to try to cool down. Still, I think there was one rider who abandoned, for whom it [had been] too much."

Timmer's team-mate Ramon Sinkeldam abandoned on stage 14 after suffering from sickness and the heat, which was no doubt exacerbated by some sweaty nights of misery. Team Sky's Luke Rowe told *Cycle Sport* he'd even noticed some riders trying to get some rest on their balconies, their rooms were so hot.

"The hotel we had in the Pyrenees was really bad, it was one of the old Campanile hotels in Pau with no air conditioning and somebody stole my shoes," added stage 17 winner Simon Geschke. "I left them in front of the door because they smelt really bad after the stage. Some of the hotel guests must have taken them."

A level playing field

Race organisers arrange rider hotels in advance — it's one way that fans are able to predict the route of an upcoming Grand Tour. Some hotels are well received — Team Sky stayed in a five star chateau during the first rest day of this year's Tour in Pau — and organisers are supposed to deal out the bad hotels

"There was no air conditioning and someone stole my shoes"









equally among teams during the race. However, in some rural or mountainous areas organisers aren't left with a lot of choice. Southern Italy, it appears, is a particular hotel blackspot, although Katusha's Marco Haller recalled once sleeping in a school for a week during the Tour de l'Abitibi in Canada.

"Every team got a classroom for six riders, three staff, a mechanic room and a massage table," he said. "The blackboard was still there, and instead of the desks were nine mattresses."

Despite the obvious benefit to riders and the precedent set by Richie Porte's Fleetwood Excursion RV at this year's Giro d'Italia, the UCI stepped in to ban riders from sleeping in their own motorhomes in advance of the Tour, affirming that riders must stay in race

Above: Corking! Team Sky enjoyed the fruits of a five-star chateau during the first rest day

Top right: John Degenkolb chats on the steps of his dilapidated dwellings

Left: In the off the red! Cav takes advantage of the amenities in an Etixx hotel organisation-approved accommodation. The best teams could do was put staff up in a motorhome (or additional hotel) and allow the riders to move from two (or more) per room to single-occupancy.

The argument for this, peddled by the likes of FDJ team boss (and ardent traditionalist) Marc Madiot, is that bad hotels are cycling's great leveller.

Like the team bus phenomenon of the last 20 years, Madiot worries that, if not properly controlled, the Tour could eventually see 200 motorhomes trucking around France for three weeks. It would be a nightmare for the Tour's green credentials (not to mention the parking) and a further nail in the coffin for small teams already faced with crippling logistics bills just to keep up with the big budget galacticos.

Indeed Sky still brought three motorhomes to the 2015 Tour, one of which saw action as Sir Dave Brailsford's mobile hotel and office. Not long into the race, paparazzi were seen hiding in a bush outside one of the team's hotels aiming to catch a glimpse of the yellow jersey sneaking into the aforementioned motorhome with a blanket and a cuddly LCL lion for 40 illegal winks. They eventually left disappointed.

A Tour rider's vulnerability to a rough night's sleep remains truly egalitarian. Today's riders might have electronic groupsets, isotonic sports drinks developed in a laboratory, team buses and kitchen trucks, but any one of them, regardless of nationality or team, can still see their Tour hopes disappear down a mouldy plughole thanks to an unexpected dodgy hotel.

Anonymous heroes

Sophie Hurcom

ne hundred and ninety-eight riders lined up on the Tour de France start ramp in Utrecht. Few of them wore any of the leaders' jerseys or won one of the 21 stages. In fact, many of the riders went through the entire race with barely a mention. So who are the riders that don't make the headlines, and what's their story?

Trek Factory Racing's Gregory Rast finished the Tour in 102nd place. A rider who enjoys the Classics, the Tour is not his favourite terrain and his role was to support team-mate Bauke Mollema's bid for the GC.

"You come here only to work, not even to get in the breakaway," he said. "My job especially [during] the first week was to try to keep Bauke out of trouble so that he didn't lose some senseless minutes somewhere in the Roubaix stage [stage four]."

"I'm not a big fan of the Tour actually, I've only done it five times. My favourite races are the Classics — Flanders I've done like 12 or 13 times."

When the race hit the mountains, Rast found himself out of his element. "Most of the time for me with my weight and my climbing skills I work until the bottom of the climb and take bottles, and then I get dropped and ride to the finish."

Matthias Brändle, of IAM Cycling, made his Tour debut this year. Having set the Hour record last October, he had a strong ride on the opening time trial, finishing just 23 seconds down on Rohan Dennis. "I was seventh in the time trial, really close to the win, I'm proud of that," the 25-year-old said.

"I was in good shape when I started, and wanted to be a good helper. But when the temperature went up later in the race, it became really, really hard. It was like my body didn't work for me. I'm not a climber, I'm strong on flat and hilly stages, but the mountains in the heat have been a really tough challenge."

He may have finished in 156th place, more than four and a half hours down on



"I'm proud that in some stages I could help my leader"



Chris Froome, but that was enough of an achievement. "I'm proud that in some stages I could help my leader," he said.

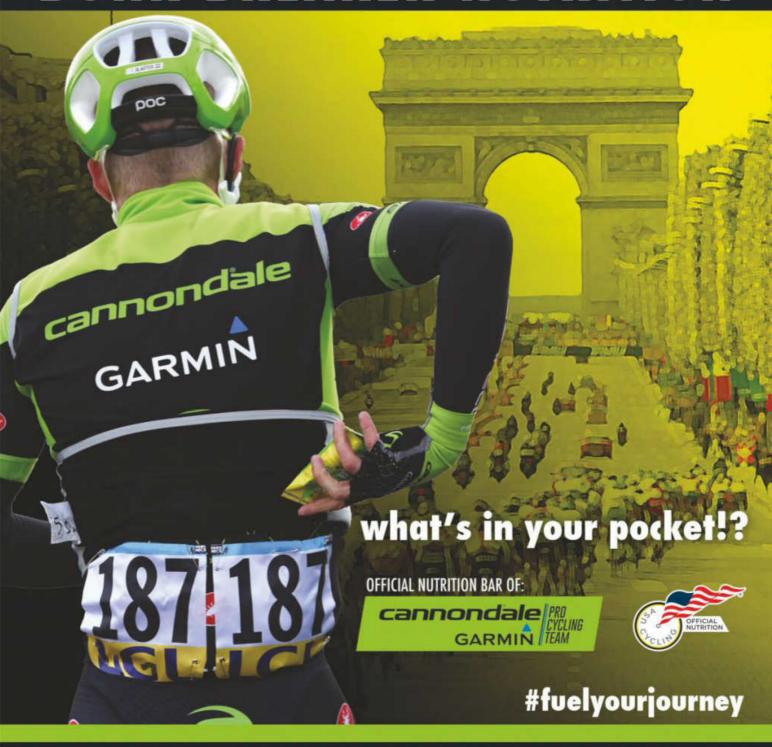
With a Grand Départ in his home country, the Tour couldn't have begun better for Lotto-NL Jumbo's Tom Leezer. "As a Dutchman the time trial in Utrecht was, and probably always will be, the most beautiful start I've ever experienced as a cyclist," he said. "The crowd noise was a buzz in my ear for at least two or three hours afterwards.'

With his team-mate Robert Gesink sitting in the top 10 overall, Leezer was required to protect his leader. But as is the way at the Tour, things happen that no one can prepare for. On stage 10 he rode into the back of an Orica-GreenEdge team car — from then on it was just about survival until he made it

"I'm struggling, it's a big struggle," he said at the end of the second week. "We thought I had fractured my nose, my arm was open but they stitched it so it's OK. Breathing is not easy... the bruises they hurt."

Additional reporting by Michael Hutchinson

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FRENCH ESPOIR FACTORY

Les étudiants d'Etupes

Cycle Sport takes a closer look at the French amateur club that's churning out winning talent

Richard Abraham

arren Barguil, Adam Yates, Thibaut Pinot and Alexis Vuillermoz: all young riders who spiced up the 2015 Tour de France with outstanding individual performances. The latter two each took a stage win. They all have something in common, having served their apprenticeships at a club that is making its name as a conveyor belt of France's up-andcoming cycling talent: CC Etupes. Graduates of this one amateur club in a remote corner of eastern France have thrived in 2015. Why?

"When I started working with CC Etupes in 2008 with [manager] Jérôme Gannat, we tried to bring in something which didn't exist at all in the amateur scene in France, which was training with power meters," explains Julien Pinot, brother to Thibaut and now a trainer with FDJ. "We tried to innovate with our way of working and it helped the talented young riders."

The youth of recent years is now maturing nicely. Yates (22) infiltrated breakaway after breakaway and finished in the top 10 on the first summit finish to La Pierre-St Martin. Barguil (23) stuck with the GC favourites and finished 14th overall, almost riding into a cow on the Col du Tourmalet (and definitely riding into Geraint Thomas on the Col de Manse) in the process. Vuillermoz (27) took France's first stage win with a devastating kick to Mûr de Bretagne.

Pinot (25), who had a dreadful first week, threw all but the kitchen sink at the race and was finally rewarded with a solo win on Alpe d'Huez.

All, you feel, can get a lot better. Other graduates in the current pro ranks include Rudy Molard, Geoffrey Soupe (Cofidis), Petr Vakoc (Etixx-Quick Step), Kenny Ellissonde (FDJ), and Jonathan Fumeaux (IAM).



Breaking the mould

Etupes broke the mould for the French amateur scene; they opted against hiring mercenary amateurs with plenty of wins to their name, in favour of developing young talent. Bold, bald and entrepreneurial; indeed, Gannat is something of a Gallic Dave Brailsford. It wasn't rocket science, but his scientific, youth-oriented approach kick-started a production line of young riders, each of whom has been well-equipped, physically and mentally, for life in the pro ranks.

It also helps that there's not a lot going on in Etupes, a tiny town near the Swiss border. Besides local football team Sochaux, there's little to distract lads in their early 20s away from the serious business of riding their bikes in the ideal training terrain of the Jura.

"Etupes do a very good job," said

Barguil finished this year's Tour in 14th place despite errant cows and Welshmen

Vincent Lavenu, boss of Ag2r La Mondiale, which also runs an amateur feeder team — Chambery CF — under the same principals. Ag2r can thank CC Etupes for its new Tour star Vuillermoz while rival French teams have already got their eyes on the next crop of amateurs.

FDJ will take on Fabian Doubey (21) and Jérémy Maison (22) as stagiaires in 2015 and have shown interest in Damien Touzé (19) and U23 Liège-Bastogne-Liège winner Guillaume Martin (22). Meanwhile Hugo Hofstetter (21), third in U23 Paris-Roubaix, will ride as a stagiaire with Cofidis this summer.

"It used to be that when you hired a French rider, you didn't know anything about them," Lavenu added. "But now, when they come from a club like Etupes. you know that they have good trainers and that they will be good quality."

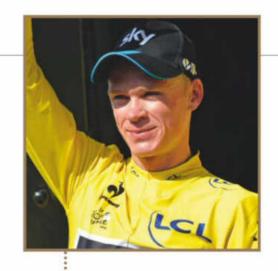


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MEN AND WOMEN OF THE MOMENT

Team of the month

An easy team to assemble this month thanks to so many standout Tour performances. Chapeau, Team CS!





ANNA VAN DER BREGGEN (RABOBANK-LIV)

Her victory at the biggest race on the women's calendar, the Giro Rosa, was comprehensive. Consistent finishing and a dominant time trial win sealed her victory, before going on to take the win in the second edition of La Course with a late attack.



ROMAIN BARDET (AG2R LA MONDIALE)

Tenth overall in Paris and with a classy stage win from the break in Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne to his name, the youthful-looking Ag2r man also put up a valiant fight for the polka-dot jersey, falling just short on the penultimate stage of the race.



AMANDA SPRATT (ORICA-AIS)

A key member of the team that assisted Emma Johansson to her third win in the Thüringen Rundfahrt, Spratt was on the podium three times herself and ended up in fourth overall, 26 seconds behind her Swedish team leader.



Who else? It was a commanding second Tour de foot wrong in the tricky opening week and then

France victory for the 30-year-old. He didn't put a stamped his authority on the race in the Pyrenees. From then on, the result was never in doubt.



PETER SAGAN (TINKOFF-SAXO)

Tour de France green jersey winner for the fourth year in a row at the tender age of 24. One of the most entertaining riders at the race; his descent into Gap on stage 16 was a Tour highlight.



ADAM HANSEN (LOTTO-SOUDAL)

The Aussie finished his 12th Grand Tour in a row despite crashing and dislocating his shoulder on only the second day of the Tour. He even managed to feature in the breakaway on stage 16. A true hardman.



ANDRÉ GREIPEL (LOTTO-SOUDAL)

With four stage wins, the big German was the premier sprinter at the Tour. He won in a number of different ways too, from surviving the crosswinds to powering uphill in Amiens and finally taking the big one on the Champs-Elysées.



GERAINT THOMAS (TEAM SKY)

Despite falling away in the Alps, the Welshman had a breakthrough Tour. He was seemingly always at the side of team leader Chris Froome, and proved his potential for future GC leadership with a series of impressive rides.



STEVE CUMMINGS (MTN-QHUBEKA)

The African team wanted to make an impact at their first ever Tour de France and, thanks to the Merseysider, they did so in style. That his stage win in Mende fell on Nelson Mandela Dau was the icing on the cake.



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Last resort

Mavic's neutral support bike

The Tour de France goes to serious lengths to make sure that riders don't suffer when their bikes go wrong. Team cars hover behind the break and bunch, while a swarm of yellow and black Mavic neutral service motorbikes and cars buzz around the riders. When a bright yellow carbon Canyon with the latest Mavic wheels won't do, most GC favourites make sure they are surrounded by at least one team-mate willing to selflessly donate their machine.

Yet when a rider is so far behind the front of the race that none of the above options are anywhere near them, there's this bike: the ultimate two-wheeled last resort. In fact there are two, the only two remaining aluminium bikes in the Tour, perched on top of an official Skoda that's at the very back of the race.

One has got toe-clips; the other no pedals at all.

These bikes, which look like little more than a collection of parts purchased on eBay with a strict budget, are the ones that the Tour organisers like to keep quiet about.

When *Cycle Sport* approached one morning, officials near the car took one look at the camera equipment and press accreditation and darted off in all directions

as if executing a planned evacuation.

One source, however, explained that this bike in particular was used by Jens Voigt when he famously crashed in the 2010 Tour. Having fallen on the descent of the Col de

The rear derailleur is Campagnolo Chorus dating from 2009, the year the Italian firm introduced 11-speed to the groupset

Peyresourde in the Pyrenees, smashing his machine, Voigt found himself isolated behind all the team cars.

With the broomwagon bearing down on him, he hopped on the only bike available to him, this tiny Mavic machine, and made it 60km down the road where his team boss Bjarne Riis, having heard of Voigt's crash, had left a replacement bike with a policeman on the roadside.

The vintage chic chainset is

an FSA SLK model

from around 2008

It might be an ageing mongrel of a machine but it cemented Voigt's

cult hero status and propelled him onwards to notch up the 10th of his 14 Tour de France finishes. Toe-clips or not, that's really all a Tour de France

bike is there to do.





Suffering under scrutiny

Jérémy Roy Inside the peloton

A breakaway legend and bunch documentarian, the ever-friendly Frenchman is now in his 13th year with FDJ

uly. Golden wheat is hanging ready for harvest, the beaches are packed full of bronze holidaymakers, and winding its way through it all is a serpentine trail of cyclists, riding flat-out, overcoming adversity and pushing the boundaries of pain. The Tour de France.

Four years ago I enjoyed what, in my eyes, was my perfect Tour moment. Me, alone, at the front of the race, climbing a high mountain pass. Of course I was lucky in 2011 not to have to work for a leader who was in contention for the GC (I also had great form and I was on cloud nine after just becoming a father for the first time) and I was allowed to spend a few days in the break, without any of the stress of

the peloton. As far as I was concerned it felt as if I was using less energy in a breakaway than I would in the bunch – once you've got over the effort of getting away, the effort was more linear compared to a peloton, where there were stoppages all the time (brake, crash, accelerate, repeat).

Nervous energy

The Tour de France isn't always the hardest race in terms of terrain, but until a certain hierarchy is established it is a very nervous race. That's why there are so many crashes in the first week; no leader wants to lose time, every team-mate wants to do their job for his leader, other riders want to win the stage, and there isn't space for

everybody. We've got a saying: "la route est plus longue que large". The road is much longer than it is wide.

What we as riders notice about the Tour is the enormous media presence. Team leaders have to face up to question after question from journalists, questions which can easily knock their fragile confidence. They get followed around at every stage finish like some sort of weird and wonderful animal, so even the slightest weakness can spell doom for a team leader: the press is able stick a knife into them, prize them open, and rub salt into their wounds.

I rode the 2013 Tour alongside Thibaut Pinot, who had been catapulted into the position of team leader after a good ride in 2012. Thibaut had already been in demand ahead of the Tour, going from interview to interview with all of them putting him forward as France's next Tour champion. But by the end of the first week of that Tour, Thibaut had suffered a bad day in the mountains and lost five minutes.

That would be hard to swallow at the best of times, but he then had to stand up and answer questions about it from all the journalists.

I watched him struggle to deal with the resulting headlines and saw him get into a downward spiral in tandem with a nasty case of bronchitis. He abandoned the Tour on stage 16. That year allowed him to build his own little psychological shell, and nowadays he is much more at ease with all the attention.

Even though it's not always easy to respond to every request from the media, we know it's important for cycling, for the sponsors, the team and us as riders. Even if it means another Herculean effort after a day of racing. sometimes you just have to grin and bear it







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DEDICATED DOODLER

Penned portraits of the peloton

French television cameraman unwinds after each Tour stage with a newspaper and a biro

Nick Bull

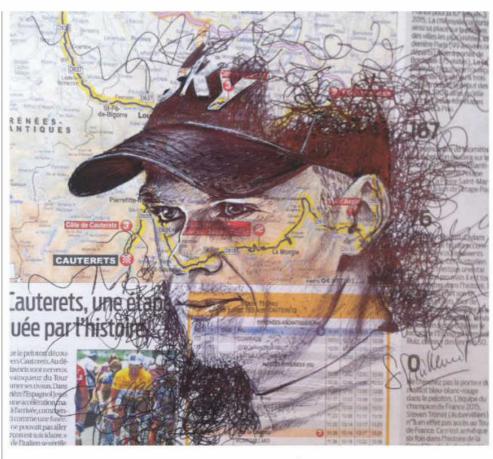
y day he filmed Juan Antonio Flecha's numerous interviews for Eurosport's Tour de France coverage. However, by night, Sam Guillemot became an artist extraordinaire.

The 43-year-old Parisian found the best way of relaxing from each day's workload was to draw portraits of the race's big-name riders. To give them a unique feel, Guillemot used only a black Bic biro, and gave them context by using newspaper as his canvas.

"I've been drawing for most of my life, but only started drawing portraits in the last few years," he said. "I wanted to do something different which is how I came up with the idea of drawing on newspaper.







Main: Froome looks focused in this portrait Top left: Cavendish was suitably impressed with his vignette Left: El Pistolero meets Le Stylo: Contador is perfectly depicted

"I started doing this to find a link between the person I'm drawing and an event or the news. So during the Tour, I used [French sports daily] L'Équipe or the Tour pages from other newspapers. It gives the drawings added meaning."

Mark Cavendish and Chris Froome were reportedly both impressed with his efforts, and signed their respective artworks. "I'm going to send a copy of my drawing to Cavendish." Guillemot added. "Each one takes around two hours: the starting point is a good photograph

online so I only ever draw in hotels that have wi-fi and somewhere comfortable

"I find it a very good way to relax in the evenings. We covered every start and finish, so in the days we were very busy."

Guillemot also works on non-cycling events such as the French Open tennis, which means he has a large portfolio of drawings that he is considering displaying to the public in the near future.

And which one is his favourite? "The next one is always the best," he smiled.



Pick of the bunch





Turbine nasal dilator

Chris Froome was spotted at the Tour de France wearing what appeared to be a nose ring, however, further investigation revealed that it was in fact a Turbine nasal dilator. The small, plastic clip fits into your nostrils and widens their aperture, with a claimed increase in airflow of up to 38 per cent.

www.rhinomed.global (www.velobrands.co.uk) £9.99

Oakley Tour de France Prizm Road Jawbreaker sunglasses

The Jawbreaker was designed in collaboration with Mark Cavendish and comes in seven different colours. The lenses come equipped with Oakley's class-leading optic technology, can be changed quickly via the Switchlock system and have a wide field of vision — particularly towards the top for head-down sprints. www.oakley.com £190



Nopinz Supersuit

Pinning your race number on can add significant drag, particularly if one of the pins comes loose while you are racing. Now Nopinz has come up with a skinsuit with a built-in race number pocket. This was used in the Tour de France by team Lotto-JumboNL and is claimed to save around 20 seconds during a 60-minute time trial.

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GoPro Hero4 Session

GoPro has miniaturised its technology to fit into the Hero4 Session. It's 50 per cent smaller and 40 per cent lighter than the standard Hero4, and should reduce wind resistance significantly too. With on-bike video from top races a must-see, you can emulate the pros and publish footage of your own epic descents and sprints.

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Elite Corsa bottle

The majority of WorldTour teams use Elite's bottles. They're cheap, light, functional and hygienic, being easy to take apart, and are dishwasher safe. They're also biodegradable, which is handy if you've a tendency to toss them into the hedgerows during a race. The lid has a safety design that will snap apart if the bottle is run over, so there's less chance of being thrown off your bike should you hit one.

www.elite-it.com £3.99





Team Sky domestique **Ian Boswell** made the most of his free time during July after being left out of the nine-man Tour de France squad

Kenny Pryde

hat do you do in July if you are a professional cyclist in a WorldTour team and you didn't make the final cut of nine riders taking part in the Tour de France? Do you give three cheers and head for the beach? Do you turn into a super-fan and hunker down in front of your giant plasma screen and watch the Tour like the rest of us? Or do you plan a biking holiday like Team Sky rider Ian Boswell did?

Boswell, in his third year with Team Sky, was an unavoidable presence during June's Critérium du Dauphiné, where his tempo riding in the Alps brought him to a wider audience. Yet he was given July off.

Riding for the hell of it

So the American from Bend, Oregon, invited his younger brother Austin over and they planned a cycling holiday. "A few of the guys on the team couldn't understand why I would want to ride my bike," he says. "I came to the conclusion that basically I just love riding my bike."

After the Dauphiné, Boswell did actually take some time off riding and headed to the beach near his base in Nice to "eat pizza every night," though Boswell's blowout lasted barely four days after which it was time to saddle up again.

"We left from Nice and did 600km or something, it was way too much," chuckles Boswell. "The panniers and kit added 15kg to the bike but it was one of the most enjoyable things I've ever done on a bike because so often, especially down in Nice and the Alpes Maritimes, there are so many beautiful sights, little bakeries and plaques explaining the local history that you don't see because you're doing intervals."

The Boswell brothers and Earle picked four big towns to visit and whatever happened in between, happened. "We had all day and all we each brought was one cycling kit, flip-flops, swimsuit, T-shirt and a rain cape, that was it."

Laid-back as it was, Boswell's European vacation did take in a tremendous amount of climbing in the Alps and over to Italy and back. But all good things come to an end and there was a definite back-to-school feel about the 10-day training camp in Sestriere that also featured in July.

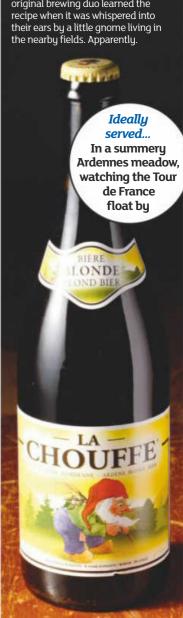
With a ride in the Vuelta likely, it might be that next July Boswell will get a different perspective of the Tour de France. In the meantime, he's enjoying his alternative view.

"When you write this up, don't mention to the mechanics we had panniers on our race bikes, eh?" he adds. Sure thing Ian, sure thing...

BELGIAN BEER OF THE MONTH

La Chouffe

Brewed in the Belgian Ardennes, not far from the hills tackled by the Tour de France on stage three of this year's race, La Chouffe is eight per cent like the opening slopes of the Mur de Huy that saw the culmination of the stage. Legend has it that the original brewing duo learned the recipe when it was whispered into their ears by a little gnome living in the nearby fields. Apparently.







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Distilling the agonies

Graham Watson Life through the lens

A race-snapping legend with more than 30 years on the scene and over 20 books on pro cycling. Check his latest shots at grahamwatson.com

o Tour de France passes without attracting controversy. From a photographer's view, the accident that knocked Jakob Fuglsang to the ground on stage 18 struck a deep chord. Ever since a photographer's moto dragged Niki Sorensen along the road in full view of TV in the 2011 Tour, rules have come into effect that make travelling inside the Tour a very serious affair.

It's quite simple: knock a cyclist to the ground, even if the fault is not totally one's own, and you're out of the Tour, probably for life. I mean the driver, not the passenger. ASO uses current or ex-policemen for their moto-drivers, whereas people like myself hire our own trusted drivers, who most likely have

driven for years in all types of races, and who know better how to do it.

ASO was obliged to kick moto No 538 out, but what they didn't publicise was that it was an ASO Kawasaki, driven by an ASO-approved driver, and even with an ASO videographer as the passenger. The irony wasn't lost on us 'outsiders', as there'll come a day when ASO, because of liability concerns, supplies all the drivers on the Tour.

That said, I found this year's race one of the easiest for years in which to work. It wasn't just because of the shorter stages and subsequently better downtime. The Tour is now being run by younger men, ex-cyclists who know what people like me do and need to do, and these guys gave me and my colleagues much-improved access in the race.

The downside of such a privilege is the rush to send images. Most photographers can now transmit images out of their cameras as long as a stable 3G phone signal is available. I've yet to go to this next step, as the image quality is decreased in order to get the unedited images out into cyber-space. I prefer to hightail it to the press-centre, work flat-out for a few hours, and get the high-res images out to as many of my clients as I can. It's just like when I was shooting on slide-film in 2001 while everyone else was on digital; I'm a dying breed these days.

Tail-end heroes

I certainly won't forget the hellish first days that got the 2015 Tour under way. You might be surprised to know that I get as much, if not more, pleasure out of photographing the tail end of the race than I do the 'first-class' end. TV rarely shows the suffering that goes on behind. Jack Bauer was my real hero of the Tour.

He was in that massive crash on stage three only to crash again on stage five. His hip was so badly banged-up that he couldn't pedal properly, yet he continued to chase and regained the sanctuary of the peloton. Even then his team pleaded with him to stop, but he wouldn't. Then he fell again, and left the Tour in tears.

There were similar stories for another dozen riders, all of them heroes, proving that the Tour is about more than just winning. It's about the surviving too.



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Letters

Star letter...

BAND OF BROTHERS

Chris Froome and Team Sky deserve congratulation and respect for what they have just achieved — and for the way in which they achieved it — at this year's epic Tour de France. No rider or team should have to endure the shameful level of unrestrained assault and hostility such as that directed at Froome and Sky from the roadside and jealous French media.

Something truly special happened this year with a remarkable group of tough, talented and refreshingly likeable individuals becoming one in giving absolutely everything they had and more for Froomey, their magnificent team leader.

I hope theu all take the time to realise and savour what they have accomplished together, for it was more than just a race win. From top to bottom, on and off the bike, they were simply magnificent. Dignified in the face of outrageous provocation, they quite literally soaked up all that was thrown at them. Directing their energy to where it was needed, together on the road, all for the cause. Unstoppable.

We salute the true gent and champion Chris Froome and 2015's awesome band of brothers. You done good!

Chris Natural, Brighton

LETTER OF THE MONTH:

Wins a pair of Lazer Magneto M1 sunglasses Worth £89.99



Tunnel vision

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Over the past several years, the bike industry has gone aero crazy with new bikes and helmets. Some manufacturers have made bold claims, no doubt all in the name of selling more bikes and equipment.

However, the flaw in all of the testing is that they put a single bike, with rider sometimes, in a wind tunnel with smooth, clean flowing air and base their results on the outcome of this artificial scenario. In reality, riders in a pack or pace line never get that clean flowing air. I would love to see a wind tunnel test where there are three or four bikes and see how the aero results change when it is using swirling, dirty flowing air. My educated guess is that those benefits will reduce drastically, leading



Chris Froome nears the finish of the final stage, 21, in Paris

to far less impressive claims. Michael Elmer, Colorado Springs

Ride until the very end

It is possible Chris Froome was lucky to win the Tour de France on Saturday July 25. It seems Christian Prudhomme called for the 'final' stage to be on the Saturday rather than the Sunday, due to the excessive rain. The women's event wasn't shortened

- in fact the rain during their race was much worse than the men's event.

If the event had finished in a competitive fashion Quintana may have won, especially when Froome was forced to swap bikes when a wrapper got caught up in his rear derailleur. I fail to understand why the last stage in recent years has become a parade.

> Yours faithfully Martin R Hill, email

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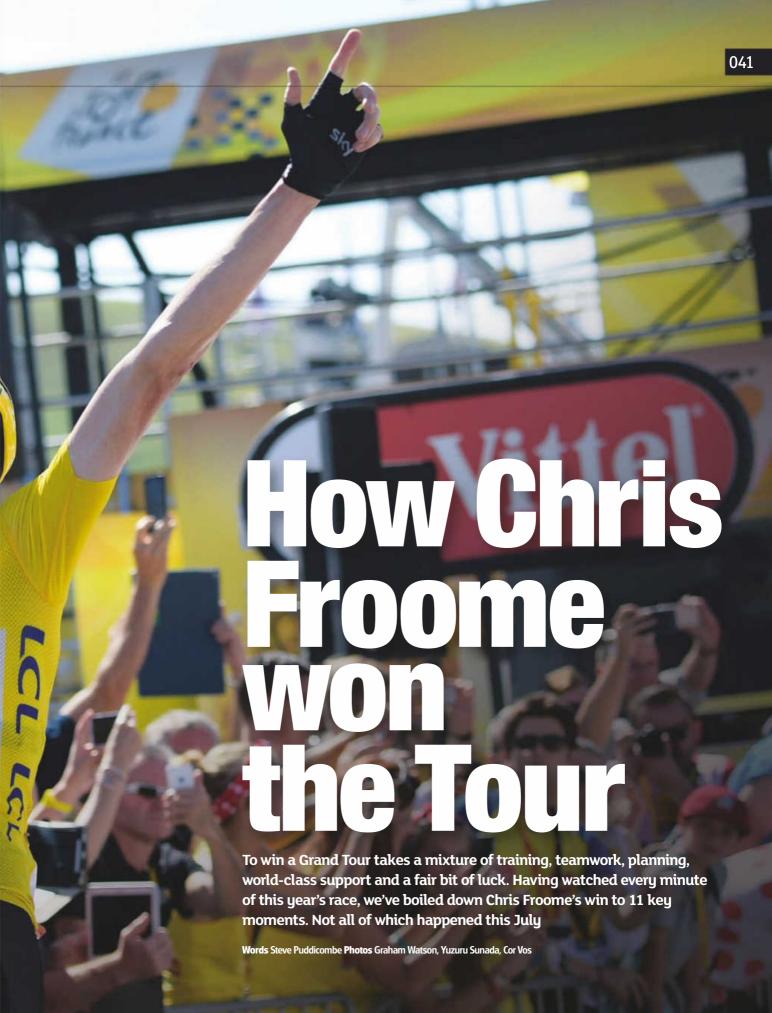


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The moment Alberto Contador 'won' the 2010 Tour It's been received wisdom for years that an Alberto Contador on top form is virtually impossible to stop. Since his breakthrough year in 2007 he's won seven of the nine Grand Tours he's completed (not including those that have been struck from the record for doping violations), and as recently as this season's Giro he was looking as imperious as ever.

The Contador we saw at the Tour this year then was clearly not on top form. He was unusually quiet in the first week, opting for a far more defensive strategy than we've come to expect from him, and was a shadow of his former self in the second and third weeks in the mountains. With no word of illness or other ailments, it was clear that the effort it took to win the Giro a few months ago had caught up with him.

So what compelled Contador to attempt such a feat as notoriously difficult as the Giro-Tour double? For that we'd have to go back to the moment when winning the Tour appears to have no longer been enough for him - the 2010 Tour. Upon 'winning' that race (the infamous positive clenbuterol test has since awarded the win to Andy Schleck), Contador had, by the age of 27, achieved his major career goals. Not only had he won three Tours de France, but also a Giro and a Vuelta in his sole attempts at each. Winning Grand Tours was

becoming monotonous. Beyond simply winning more, what else was left for him to achieve?

He first attempted the double the very next year (albeit under different circumstances, knowing his participation in the Tour was under threat due to his ongoing clenbuterol investigation), which panned out in much the same way as his attempt this year: he won the Giro emphatically, but could only manage fifth at the Tour.

That Tour represented a first for Contador — a Grand Tour that he had failed to win. The difficulty of reaching top form for both races had become painfully clear to him, but rather than put him off from attempting the double again, it seemed to inspire him more, as if finally he had found a difficult enough challenge worthy of his exceptional talent. The result of the clenbuterol case and subsequent doping ban delayed the attempt for a few years as Contador took a while upon returning to rediscover his best form, but after a very impressive 2014, where he again looked like the best tour rider in the world, he opted to try again this year.

But, as we now know, the task proved once again beyond him. Froome won the Tour beating the three best Grand Tour riders of this generation (save himself), but the most dangerous of those was nowhere near his top form. Had Contador arrived at the Tour on top form the race would have been very different. But past success and an ambitious mentality ultimately worked in the Briton's favour.







Nairo Quintana struggling in the crosswinds
Going into the Tour, all the talk concerning Nairo Quintana was of how much time would he lose during the first week. As it happened, he negotiated the many hazards and crashes very well, only losing three seconds to Froome

between stages three and nine.

All the obstacles that is, apart from the crosswinds. He was just one of several favourites to be left on the wrong side of a split in the peloton when the echelons started forming during stage two, while Froome, Alberto Contador and Tejay van Garderen all finished safely in a lead group 88 seconds up the road. At the time the result didn't seem so bad, given that we were expecting him to lose time in the first week, but in hindsight it could have cost him the Tour. The 88 seconds he lost on stage two turned out to be his single biggest time loss throughout the whole race (bigger still than the 74 seconds lost on La Pierre-Saint-Martin when Froome won the stage), and, as many pointed out after the Alpe d'Huez stage, greater than the 72 seconds by which he ultimately lost the Tour to Froome.

Though it would of course be one heck of assumption to say that had Quintana not been caught out the yellow would be his — the race would have panned out in a completely different manner had he not lost the time —

there's little doubt he would have stood a better chance of winning had he been positioned in the right side of the split with Froome.

Accelerating away on the Mur de Huy
Froome seemed to surprise himself with just how quickly he flew up the brutally steep Mur de Huy to finish second on stage three. By taking yellow and distancing his rivals so early in the race, he put down his marker as the man to beat.

When the wind changed direction ahead of stage four Perhaps more than any other day at the 2014 Tour de France, the cobbles on stage five were where Vincenzo Nibali did the most to seal his overall victory — not only did his main rival Froome crash out on that wet, miserable day, the Italian also put at least two minutes into virtually all of the other GC hopefuls.

Consequently, the Italian had this year clearly earmarked the similar parcours of stage four as a crucial moment for him to gain time. Once again he rode with aggression and style, relentlessly applying pressure at the front of the peloton whenever they reached the pavé, and did at times manage to put some distance on Froome and co. But unlike last year, those gaps were quickly closed down and Nibali ultimately



finished in a group of 34 with all the other overall favourites.

So what was different this year? On one hand the dry conditions made the cobbles easier to navigate, and they weren't as severe as last year's. But perhaps the most significant factor was the headwind that Nibali kept riding into whenever he attacked. The defending champion may have proven himself as the strongest of the favourites on the cobbles, and the one with the bike handling skills to suit, but without a suitable wind to assist him there was no way of translating his rough-road superiority into time.

It always felt like if Nibali was to have any hope of winning this year's Tour, he needed to be ahead of his rivals going into the mountains;





by failing to gain time on the cobbles, as well as having lost a minute and a half in the crosswinds on stage two, he was instead on the back foot straight away. After this missed opportunity, he seemed to break down psychologically: on stage six he lost his temper and threw a bidon at Froome, mistakenly blaming him for a crash; and on stage eight he was dropped on the Mûr-de-Bretagne. The following day his Astana team looked incoherent in the time trial.

By the time a dejected Nibali lost another 4.25 on La Pierre-Saint-Martin, the deficit from him to Froome was already insurmountable — just 11 days into the Tour and Froome had already defeated one of his most dangerous rivals for the win.

Froome's attack to La **Pierre-Saint-Martin** With a little over six kilometres to go to the first mountain top finish of the Tour there were just three men remaining at the head of the race. Froome, Richie Porte and Quintana. Save a few half-hearted, exploratory attacks by Alejandro Valverde, the damage had been done on the climb by Team Sky; the same tactic the team had used to win in 2012 and 2013.

Contador, Nibali and van Garderen had already been distanced by the time Froome launched an attack so explosive that it looked like it would end the race for the yellow jersey there and then.

Coming just after a rest day, and with no other serious climbs and variables to worry about, the stage was perfect for Sky. The significance of the former especially should not be downplayed. The first serious mountain climb of the Tour is always unpredictable as riders have to find their legs. The day after a rest day equally so. When the two come together anything can happen.

This is the way Sky love to ride races. The Tour's received wisdom means nothing to their

'marginal gains', as they ride strictly to their own deeply considered and highly successful strategies; rather than merely sussing out their rivals on the first summit finish and waiting for the harder stages in the race's final week, their biggest effort went into the climb to La Pierre-Saint-Martin.

When Sky released Froome's power data for the climb — to counter the absurd numbers put out by experts on French TV — the numbers suggested that rather than Froome and his domestiques being uncommonly strong on this day, his rivals were uncommonly weak. Adjusting for Froome's Q rings, his 30-minute power numbers were around 390 watts. Impressive? Yes. Abnormal? Far from it.

When you think about the difficulty so many riders have had previously following a rest day, as well as Sky's history of targeting factors of racing for marginal gains that have gone overlooked by other teams, perhaps the result isn't so surprising.

The lack of any other climbs en route suited Sky's preference for a straightforward strategy — preserve energy, then ride hard on the climb. Geraint Thomas and Porte set an electrifying pace up its lower slopes that saw the peloton





whittled down to just a handful of riders, before Froome went solo with six and a half kilometres still to ride, leaving everyone in his wake.

The following 15 minutes up the climb were just as devastating for the other GC hopefuls, who all saw their hopes slip away as the time gaps from the yellow jersey continued to balloon. Van Garderen, Contador and defending champion Nibali were all scattered down the



road and forced to chase by themselves.

Even Quintana, who had been the only rider able to stick with Porte's pace, found himself unable to respond to Froome's attack, and ended up losing just over a minute. But perhaps the most damaging blow was psychological, and occurred on the finish line when the Colombian looked round to see Porte catching up to him. He suffered the

indignity of being passed and dropped by Froome's second in command who also pinched the second place time bonus. The thought must have run through Quintana's mind: how was he supposed to beat Froome if even his team-mate is that strong?

As it happened, this stage was to turn out as something of an anomaly, in the sense that Quintana managed to match Froome pedal for

pedal on every other mountain pass, even dropping him on La Toussuire and Alpe d'Huez. But the damage had already been done, and Froome and Sky's defensive position was a strong one.

Given Sky's dominance from Utrecht to Paris, it's easy to forget that this move was essentially Froome's only major attack throughout the entire Tour.



Descending the Col de Manse at the front
Given how superior Froome had been on the climbs, his rivals might have outlined the downhills as terrain on which they could eat into his lead.

The descent of the Col de Manse at the end of stage 16 was the first of several tricky descents the riders were to tackle upon heading into the Alps, and indeed both Nibali and Valverde tried to put time into Froome.

But Froome was equal to them, confidently moving to the front of the group to neutralise Valverde's attack and ensure Nibali did not gain substantial time.

Such positioning was crucial, not only in avoiding accidents (if he'd been further behind, perhaps it would have been him rather than Thomas knocked into a ditch by Warren Barguil), but to reinforce his status as leader on terrain that might otherwise have been viewed as a potential weakness.

Movistar chasing down Contador's attacks
Come the Alps, it was clear that if anyone wanted to supplant Chris Froome as race leader, imaginative and audacious tactics would be needed.
Imaginative and audacious might as well be

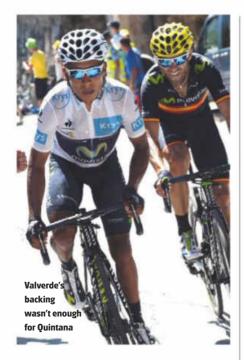
Alberto Contador's middle names and when during the first day in the Alps to Pra Loup he shot off the front of the peloton with team-mate Michael Rogers, on the second-category Col de la Colle, over 70km from the finish, the race looked set to burst into life.

But moments later came the deflating sight of Movistar domestiques moving to the front of

the peloton. Rather than putting pressure on Sky by forcing them to chase, Movistar were more worried about protecting Alejandro Valverde's podium place than softening Sky up for Quintana to exploit and aim for yellow.

Despite Movistar's frequent insistence during the final week that their main goal was still to win the Tour, evidence on the road





suggested the contrary. Quintana relied upon the final climbs of stages to make a move and on the rare occasion Valverde did appear to set up a one-two with an attack, his efforts appeared half-hearted.

If Movistar were serious about their commitment to winning the race, they should not have interpreted Contador's attack as a threat, but rather as an opportunity. Had Valverde latched onto his compatriot's wheel, and agreed to ride hard together (Contador would undoubtedly have welcomed someone to share the workload), then Sky would have had a real problem on their hands, with Quintana able to sit back and watch them burn out.

But, true to form, Valverde was unwilling to take such a risk, especially one that would benefit a team-mate rather than himself.

Promptly, the move was brought back, and the status quo resumed.

Summiting the Col de la Croix de Fer
Just minutes after suffering the stress of being isolated and suffering a mechanical, as well as seeing Nibali launch an attack off the back of it, Froome moved to the front of the peloton to be the first in that group to reach the top of the Col de la Croix Fer on stage 19.

Whether or not he was consciously going for the 14 KoM points on offer — which would have suggested extreme confidence in concentrating on anything other than just the yellow — is unclear, but either way the move demonstrated both great bullishness and control at a time of adversity.

Valverde losing
Quintana's wheel on
Alpe d'Huez
The attack from Movistar
Froome had been fearing
finally came on Alpe d'Huez. With 8km still to
go Quintana accelerated and no one could
follow, setting up a tense showdown for the rest
of the climb.

Moments earlier, Valverde had set off up the road unchallenged and hovered a few seconds ahead of the peloton, meaning that when Quintana bridged up to him, Movistar had both riders together ahead of Froome.

This was the ideal scenario for the Spanish team. With Valverde to pace him, Quintana could be confident of ascending the mountain considerably faster than Froome's domestiques Wout Poels and Porte, which in turn would have forced Froome to isolate himself and attempt to control the gap himself.

But the plan was quickly compromised

when Valverde began to slip from his teammate's wheel. As one of the best climbers in the world riding at the top of his game, Valverde would have been expected to ride at least a few kilometres at full gas to give Quintana the platform he needed to take back enough time to win yellow.

That was all Quintana needed; he had another team-mate in Winner Anacona up the road, and, as he demonstrated, was able to extend his lead over Froome and his domestiques when riding alone.

So what caused Valverde to be dropped so prematurely? Did he simply not have the legs? Or was he still worrying about protecting his third place? The fact that he was able to stick to Froome's wheel for the rest of the climb upon dropping back, as well as the fact that the Spaniard cried tears of happiness for finishing third despite Quintana's failure to take first, suggests the latter.

Had he instead given it all for Quintana, and risked losing his podium place by riding at the limit, perhaps the Colombian could have gained the extra one minute and 12 seconds necessary to win yellow. But Movistar were never as united by a single goal like Sky were. Poels and Porte buried themselves for their leader while Quintana rode alone, ensuring that Froome secured the yellow jersey.









Froome's fantastic first week Stage 3

The old adage goes that you can't win the Tour de France in the first week but you can lose it. Not so this year. Chris Froome took time out of all his rivals in the opening week with a consistent set of rides in time trials, over cobbles, in crosswinds and up the short, steep climb of the Mur de Huy (pictured) in Belgium. It was a level of dominance, on a variety of terrain, not expected from a mountain climber. Aside from stage 10 in the Pyrenees, it was the first week's time gains that won Froome this year's race. By the time he got to the Alps in the final days, both he and his team were beginning to show the strain, and a chest infection could have seen him lose the yellow jersey on the penultimate day.



TOUT CEFRANCE The Tour de France is like no other sporting event in the world. The sheer scale and number of people involved results in countless stories to tell from every stage. We've selected some of our favourites from this year's race and brought them to life over the following pages







ohan Dennis has a chip on his shoulder that could have prevented his transfer from Garmin to BMC last summer.

"In April 2014 we had a management meeting after the Classics in Belgium and I suggested Rohan for this year [2015]," explains BMC team manager Allan Peiper. "Some of the directors said, 'but we've heard he has a difficult character,' and I said, 'Yeah, he's just like me.' Most people in cycling know that the good ones are always difficult."

Dennis eventually transferred earlier than was discussed in that meeting, leaving Garmin for BMC in a rare, yet amicable transfer last August. The 25-year-old has since greatly bolstered his palmarès and drawn comparisons with Sir Bradley Wiggins. When he pulled on the first yellow jersey of this year's race, having won the opening individual time trial in Holland at race-record speed, Peiper's suggestion was affirmed — and Dennis's ability was confirmed.

Fast and focused

Dennis averaged 55.45kph over the 13.8km circuit to claim the stage and maillot jaune in 14 minutes and 56 seconds, convincingly faster than former time trial world champions Tony Martin and Fabian Cancellara, who came second and third respectively that day.

"I've always just looked out for what I needed to do to get where I needed to be. I didn't really worry too much about one individual and what they were doing, trying to beat everyone and be better than they are," Dennis told *Cycle Sport*.

The Australian first appeared on compatriot Peiper's radar in 2009 and the pair have stayed in touch since, working together at Garmin and now BMC. Peiper spent seven days at Dennis's home in Girona, Spain, in the lead-up to this year's Grand Départ, which the latter had identified as an objective at a December training camp with the US-registered squad.

"He was living for the Tour de France and all he was doing was eating, sleeping and training, but at the same time I got to know him a lot better," Peiper says. "I think he's the type of person who just

needs clear direction and things to be organised. When he knows what is expected of him, and he knows what's going to happen on a day-to-day basis, he functions really, really well.

"Support is really important to him [ensuring that] people not only believe in him but also believe what he says [so] he is not dismissed or taken lightly."

As driven as Wiggins

The win in Utrecht drew comparisons with Wiggins because, like the Briton, Dennis rarely misses targets he sets.

"Striving to be first every time I step on the bike, especially in time trials, is my main goal," he says.

The mid-season move to BMC gave the Grand Tour aspirant a head start on a stand-out season that at the time of going to print included a stage win and race title at the Tour Down Under, UCI Hour record, a stint in the yellow jersey at the Critérium du Dauphiné and the Tour de France in which he was the big motor of the squad that won the stage nine team time trial.

"I could make the transition and there was no pressure in the second half of last year to get results, but this year it was, 'OK, now it's time to put your foot down and work hard'," Dennis says.

The Olympic team pursuit silver medallist has competed with his ambitions and a spoken intent to repay the evident investments BMC has made in mind. The team has been equally committed, as Peiper's visit to Spain clearly demonstrates.

"The purpose of the trip was to win the individual time trial at the Tour de France. That was a part of the plan for the team and me going down there — the support," Peiper says. "We had a brand new TT bike that only got delivered a week before the Tour, with a new cockpit he hadn't ridden before, so he needed to be on that bike before he even got to Holland.

"A week before the time trial in Utrecht we simulated the whole day — getting up in the morning, pre-race meal, warm-up ride," Peiper continues. "We drove out of Girona, there it was like 36°, put the rollers under a tree and then he



"Either you want to be the one winning or you want to be the one making sure your team-mate wins"

did a 14km time trial — 7km out and back. He needed to get squared away before he finally arrived in Utrecht because then really you're leaving the door open to chance a little bit."

Attitude with a difference

Dennis has a champion's attitude to racing, though there is a point of difference. At this stage of his career, he is humble enough to ride for others, not least the ill-fated BMC Tour contender Tejay van Garderen.

"I think with elite sportspeople it's one of those traits — either you yourself want to be the one winning or you want to be the one making sure that your team-mate wins, so it's just a matter of which one of those people you are. I like to be both," Dennis says.

"Obviously, when I target something, I want to win it, but when I can see my team-mate has targeted it and I haven't, I'm 100 per cent committed to helping them achieve that goal."

This dual approach is one Peiper noted after the UCI World Championship team time trial last season, held about a month after Dennis joined BMC, and when he sacrificed another day in yellow at the Tour de France for the good of van Garderen's overall race objective (see panel).

"Rohan was the motor of that [World Championship] team time trial team,"

Peiper reflects. "What was surprising about him was when they got to the finish line, and in the evening after the race, he was not acting like he was the one who made the difference. I thought that was remarkable in the sense he didn't need to confirm he was the motor of the team.

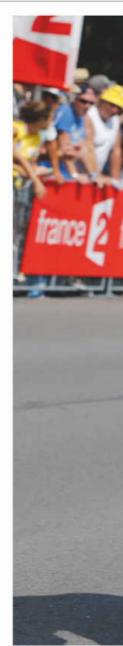
"It was probably a good thing, when he did join us, the way he stepped in and made a mark directly — they had respect for him straight away."

Career-defining moment

Dennis had three aims at the Tour de France: win the Grand Départ and team time trial and then support van Garderen as best he could in the mountains. He has aided the American at some of the biggest races this season but is set to take on more responsibility next year, in the form of leadership, as he continues to chip away at the bigger picture.

His victory at the Grand Départ was a career-defining moment but does not necessarily confirm his arrival — a compliment to the rider, implying he has more to learn, more to give and the right ingredients to meet his Grand Tour aspirations.

"In this phase of his career, his time trialling is paramount. Hopefully he'll get a World Championship individual time trial win in the next couple of years," Peiper says. "What we've talked about a lot is that Wiggins developed slowly



Main: Rohan Dennis powers his way to a record Tour de France time trial victory in Utrecht Above left: The payoff for all that effort brought yellow jersey delight to Dennis's face



over the years and didn't win the Tour until he was into his 30s, so there is time for him to do things step by step, focus on his time trialling and supporting Tejay while he develops himself.

"He finished the Vuelta last year for us and this will be the first [full] Tour de France he rides, so he has got a couple of years more to develop and then start working on his weight, be more specific on his climbing," he continues.

"He is under no illusions about how fast the good guys climb but he's also not scared. It's great he's got ideals that are semi-realistic at the moment."

Rough day in yellow

Rohan Dennis is slightly despondent when asked to describe his single day riding in the prestigious *maillot jaune*.

"It wasn't too bad," he reflects of the second stage where he and some of team-mate Tejay van Garderen's overall rivals were caught out in crosswinds. Dennis received congratulations from the crowd and his peers in the yellow jersey, which affords respect, but in a weather-affected run to Zeelande he had to prioritise van Garderen's aspirations over his own.

"That respect is thrown out the window sometimes when it's crosswinds, and I can understand that," he says, adding he'd have liked to wear yellow for more than a day. "They're going to fight for that position so they don't get dropped, and for their team objectives as well."

Van Garderen was racing in the front group

and said his team would have drilled it for Dennis had he made the decisive split, which GC rivals including Vincenzo Nibali (Astana) and Nairo Ouintana (Movistar) did not.

"Over the radio the sports director said, 'Don't pull, Rohan is behind and it's been split.' I said I'm with Nibali, don't wait, and I made Astana pull. It was a hard pill to swallow but it paid off for Tejay."

Dennis climbed on the BMC bus "pretty quickly" after the stage but soon after refocused.

"I think that says a lot about his character; he's prepared to put it to the line when he lost the jersey in the Tour," says team manager Allan Peiper. "Of course he was disappointed but he said to me in a message that night, 'I'm going to be the best domestique in the peloton for the next three weeks.' He has his own individual goals but you don't say something like that lightly."





ou don't really realise the significance of the word 'peloton' until you watch the Tour in the crosswinds. In French it means the pack. The herd. You get a peloton of thundering wildebeest. Or, since we're in France, a peloton of wild Camargue horses.

Among the peloton on stage two, full to the brim with twitchy riders galloping in the crosswinds under a leaden sky, you could feel the same sort of energy. Looking at it from the front you could draw an imaginary horizontal line. On top of the line: a row of motionless torsos and faces cocked at a slight angle to the wind, etched with lines of effort. Underneath it: a maelstrom of mucky spray, twitching wheels, stampeding legs and disappearing white lines.

On that July Sunday the weather in Holland turned from hot and humid to ice cool, as if someone had flicked on the air-conditioning, and in such a flat, coastal country the tallest thing in the way of the cold North Sea breeze between here and Norway was Sep Vanmarcke. One moment the peloton was sedately trotting through the countryside; the next it was fleeing for its life, switching direction at the last minute, faces blindly following wheels. It was as if there was a wolf pack behind them, and the ones at the back didn't want to get their legs chewed off.

"Some guy just crashed right on my back wheel and snapped my frame and I fell on my backside," said Geraint
Thomas after the stage. "When it started raining you could hardly see where you were going. It was hard enough just fighting for position."

Force of nature

The word 'crosswinds' gets bandied around preview guides and pre-race chatter like a scratched record (next year we're going to trademark the phrase 'look out for echelons' and watch the money roll in). Yet while there are some forces of nature in cycling that are quite predictable — a hors catégorie climb is always going to create splits in the peloton — crosswinds really are a complicated business. Cycle Sport

sought the advice of one former rider who was handy in the crosswinds himself, current LottoNL-Jumbo DS Frans Maassen, and the explanation he gave at the start of stage two lasted nearly 10 minutes.

Assume for the moment that the wind is coming from the right direction and at the right speed, although this is not always a given on the twisty roads of northern Europe. "There are places where there will be a lot of campervans," Maassen said. "If it's one long line of campers on the right-hand side, and the wind is coming from the right-hand side, it's a lot of wind but nothing on the road."

Let's say you're a rider and you want to cause a split. You need to take some of your team-mates, find your way to the front of the race, and ride flat-out. If you don't another team might, while you and your team-mates could find yourselves on the wrong side of a gap. Or the other teams might sit tight and the opportune moment passes everyone by.

If you ride hard it's not always certain that other teams will help out, in which case you burn up crucial energy and run the risk of not having the legs to make the split if it happens later on. If you ride, another team joins in and the split is forced, there is no guarantee that it will contain the right riders, including your own team-mates. It's really not straightforward at all.

"With the weather so bad it was hectic," said Lotto-Soudal manager Marc Sergeant after stage two. Two of his key riders — Tony Gallopin and Adam Hansen — crashed, the latter dislocating his shoulder. But his sprinter André Greipel emerged to win the stage.

"Sometimes it was quite dramatic, you'd ask yourself 'where is my rider, is he still in front?" Sargeant added. "We were just hoping Greipel was there."

Now imagine you're a rider that doesn't particularly want to force a split in the pack, but certainly doesn't want to be the wrong side of one if it happens. Maybe you're a GC rider, or a sprinter. Other teams start pushing the tempo and you have a choice. Option one: ride hard at the front. Option two: ride harder at the back. It's a no-brainer.



"For me it's easier being in the front," said Mark Cavendish. "The guys have used some energy up but you're always in the vantage point with 20 guys working, it's better than being behind trying to fight the whole time."

"When you start riding with your team, and the other teams start riding with you, then you are in the echelon and you have to fight to stay there," added Maassen. "But it's easier to fight to stay there than to get to the front later and find that the gaps have opened up and you are dropped."

Windswept victory

Of course it's never as straightforward as simply riding hard. Bunch leaders

"You have to ride with your legs, ride with your head and ride your luck"

push out upwards of 500 watts on the front and have to sprint again to get on the back of the echelon. Once you're in the gutter, unable to swing to the sweet spot of shelter slightly to the side of the rider in front, it's a desperate, messy panic just to keep the wheel. You have to ride with your legs, ride with your head, and ride your luck; LottoNL-Jumbo arguably knew the Dutch roads better than any other team and all their riders





Above: For riders like Vincenzo Nibali, caught on the wrong side of the split, it's tough to get back Left: An early crash made the peloton even more anxious

missed the front group. Just a dozen centimetres of empty air is sometimes all it takes.

None of these echelons can be pre-meditated, but a bit of planning goes a long way. Belkin and Omega Pharma-Quick Step were staying in the same hotel the night of stage 12 of the 2013 Tour de France. Those two teams helped shred the race to bits the following afternoon, with directeur sportifs not exactly denying that they'd plotted it all over a demi-pression in the hotel bar the night before. Even then, however, the crucial split that had Alberto Contador on the right side and Chris Froome on the wrong came down to a split second call.

"I saw Michael [Rogers] and I said, 'Michael, Michael come on," said Nicolas Roche, then with Saxo-Tinkoff, after the stage. "He looked around, saw Alberto [Contador], Alberto gave the nod, we shouted '[Daniele] Bennati go!' and off we went. It was something that was decided in three seconds. We were very focused."

Everybody in the peloton knew the same could, and probably would, happen again this year. It did. For the riders on the wrong side, there was nothing they could do about it.

"It was getting stressful when we went for the intermediate sprint," described Thomas. "I said to Froomey, 'are you up for it?' And he said yeah. So I said on the radio, 'right boys let's look to really attack' then we hit the canal road where it all split.

"It didn't really matter if we didn't attack, it was just the fact that everyone was switched on and ready to go there and that was perfect," Thomas added. "We were all there and up for it and in the right place at the right time when it really started hammering down and the wind was coming."

It didn't really matter at the time, perhaps, but it mattered when the race concluded three weeks later. In the front group on stage two? Chris Froome. In the second group, 88 seconds back? Nairo Quintana. The final gap between the pair, first and second overall in Paris? 72 seconds







Empty-handed Etixx Stage 2

As the wind and rain ripped the peloton apart it looked like Etixx-Quick Step held the race in the palm of their hands. The Belgian team had six riders up front and quickly took control, pulling the leading group of around 24 riders clear. Chasing the stage win and the yellow jersey across the lowlands of the Netherlands, master tactician Brian Holm – sat in the team car – expected his riders to deliver. Then in the final few hundred metres it unravelled in a matter of seconds.

Mark Renshaw found himself on the front and started the lead-out too early. Mark Cavendish then had no option but to start his sprint. But 300m into a headwind is too much for any sprinter and he was soon passed by André Greipel who took the stage win. Worse still, Peter Sagan and then Fabian Cancellara passed Cavendish on the line. In doing so the Trek Factory rider pinched the four-second time bonus and with it the yellow jersey from Tony Martin's (left, in green) grasp





he show was over, it seemed. The gruppetto had passed through sector two, an undulating 3.7km cobbled stretch to Quiévy en route to stage four's finish in Cambrai, with varying degrees of pavé-riding ability on show.

Fans who had spent hours alongside the D134 waiting for the race (and publicity caravans) arrival were folding up their chairs, dismantling their flags and had started walking - in some cases riding — along the sector's rather sizeable cobbles back to their cars and motor homes.

Then, nearly five minutes later, a police motorbike emerged from the distance, marshalling one lone rider gradually towards the finish. It was Alex Dowsett; behind him, a Movistar team car and the race's broomwagon, with the latter in particular re-emphasising the Briton's position in the race.

Dowsett is not unfamiliar with riding alone in significant pain; his penchant for time trialling, not to mention his successful Hour record attempt earlier in the year, means he has plenty of experience in it. But this was a new kind of isolated suffering for the 26-year-old, just four days into his Tour debut.

"It was a different pain to time trialling," he said. "I know that I can be competitive in time trials, so I can push myself there because of what's at stake. On the cobbles and in the mountains at the Tour, my feelings were probably similar to how Nairo [Quintana, his Movistar team-matel feels when he's riding a time trial. It's damage limitation, you do what you can."

Stars shaken

It was on the same sector that Thibaut Pinot's mechanical woes started. The cobbles exacerbated Chris Froome's unsightly style, as well as highlighting the disadvantage of 5ft 5in Julian Arredondo's genetic make-up, while MTN-Qhubeka's Merhawi Kudus appeared — rounding the sector's bend — nonplussed that his chain had

But that's the beauty of the inclusion of pavé in the Tour de France: riders



Top: A second spill on

stage four exacerbated

a painful elbow injury

Above: Accepting his

inevitable withdrawal

from the Tour was a

bitter pill to swallow



who made it to Paris can proudly say they tested their bodies on about as many different types of terrain as is deemed acceptable in this era of the sport. A finish in the race is all the richer because of the inclusion of these various surfaces.

For Dowsett, simply getting to Cambrai was an achievement. His one prior Paris-Roubaix start in 2013 resulted in a DNF, and his task on the comparable Tour stage was made all the more difficult when he suffered a nasty injury to his right elbow in an earlier tumble, one that required six stitches.

"I actually had no idea I was that close to the broomwagon," he said of his stage-four experience. "I knew I had a team car with me; I was just trying to get to the finish in time. I didn't know if I was going home or not.

"But it does feel like you're in the back of the Tour de France in that

"Any other race I'd have gone home long ago"

position. It's lonely — we didn't interfere with the radio, as the team managers were talking to Nairo and Ale [Alejandro Valverde] who were still racing up ahead. I think the crowds gave me as loud a cheer as the guys at the front, which helped."

Dowsett looked jaded as he rounded the sector's one notable bend. Visibly tired, his head bowed - a telltale sign of fatigue. Nonetheless, he got significant encouragement from those fans along the sector, virtually all of whom witnessed his arrival. The cheers were perhaps as loud as those afforded to the

gone home a long time ago," he said. "It's the Tour de France; you want to try your to get to Paris."

Nine days after the crash, the after-effects of which resulted in significant pain and fatigue, and two hours after talking to Cycle Sport, Dowsett abandoned the Tour during the race's third Pyrenean stage to Plateau de Beille. His show, at least, was finally over.

groupe maillot jaune. "With the injuries I've had, had it have been any other race, I would have best to get everything out of your body









The riding wounded Stage 3

Crashes in the opening week of the Tour de France have become an unpleasant but unavoidable feature of the race. Stage 3's however was particularly brutal and resulted in the peloton being stopped by the race officials.

It was William Bonnet (FDJ) who touched wheels and skidded to a halt. The mayhem that ensued came about as he hit the deck on a long, straight, fast stretch of road, catching everyone unawares. It resulted in a huge pile-up that saw the yellow jersey of Fabian Cancellara end up in a roadside ditch.

With all the race's medical staff stopping to assist the wounded the peloton was left without any medical back-up, forcing ASO to neutralise and then stop the race. Michael Matthews (pictured) was just one of the injured riders who picked themselves up and carried on. Cancellara continued too, but X-rays later revealed two fractured vertebrae in his lower spine, forcing him to retire from the race.



ur nent 3

LANGUAGE OF CYCLING

Although the winner and most dominant team at this year's race are both British, the language of cycling still very much belongs to France

Words Dave Nash Photos Graham Watson, Yuzuru Sunada, Lionel Bonaventure/AFP/Getty Images

rom Brittany to Sicily, Utrecht to Madrid; when Sir Dave Brailsford announced the formation of Team Sky back in 2009 and his hopes of delivering a British Tour de France champion, the established cycling hierarchy of Continental Europe let escape a collective chuckle at his ambitious goals.

Fast forward three years and the British team were one of the strongest in the pro peloton. When Sir Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome duly stood on the podium in Paris, the cycling fans and

commentators in mainland Europe who had scoffed at the upstarts from across the Channel were left spluttering and choking on their croissants and macchiatos.

These are halcyon days for British cycling and follow on from the booms of other non-traditional cycling countries such as the USA and Australia. All three have claimed Tour de France victories, numerous Grand Tour stages and a smattering of Classics and World Championships over the last 30 years. No one can argue against the contention



that Team Sky has succeeded in shaking up the natural order, yet spare a thought for the many French riders who have systematically failed to live up to their early hype, weighed down by the expectation of being the next Anquetil and the heir of Hinault.

Yet despite the fact that these English speaking countries each have booming cycling industries and can boast some of the top riders in the pro peloton as well as one of the most dominant teams, there is one area in which we remain flailing in the slipstream of our Gallic friends. In deference to the country that considers itself the 'Home of Cycling' we still borrow an inordinate amount of *Le Jargon Cycliste* from the French vocabulary, not only in our general cycling parlance, but also in other areas like brand and product names.

I am no linguist, but my schoolboy French vocab has been bolstered over the years thanks to the many cycling terms we have assimilated into our language, all of which we routinely use ahead of their English equivalent: palmarès, bidon, domestique, gilet, peloton, musette, flamme rouge and lanterne rouge to name but a few. The English translations of these words just don't hold the same resonance with road cyclists. Even some we might think of as our own have been stolen from the French; 'sportive', for example, is short for the term randonnée cyclosportive and even the dreaded Man with the Hammer, L'homme au marteau, was a Frenchman.

Team Sky is not a team to follow convention and so insist on using English terms to denote members of their staff, but 'sports director' sounds more like the title a PE teacher with an inflated sense of self-importance might award themselves, whereas his French counterpart, le directeur sportif has an inherent authority and style. Likewise, Sky riders have 'carers', rather than soigneurs, though in fairness that is a word that more accurately reflects the 24-hour pampering enjoyed by their squad members.

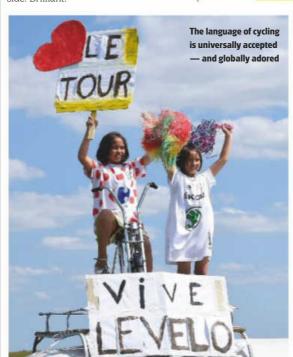
When it comes to cycling language, Anglo-Saxon doesn't quite measure up. Think of the expression 'race face' as a classic example. The French would never stoop to use a lowly rhyming couplet when a far more poetic phrase can be found. Go racing in France and the cyclists setting the pace will *péter le feu du diable* (fart the fire of the devil). Now that's a proper expression, though it's unlikely you heard Phil Liggett uttering those words during his Tour de France commentary.

Hunting potatoes

I shouldn't be too hard on English cycling vocabulary though. We do have some wonderful colloquial expressions — on the rivet, pedalling squares, the simple perfection of the word 'bonk', but the French have mastered the art of finding the succinct phrase. When a rider is feeling strong, he has fourmis dans les jambes, literally meaning to have 'ants in the legs'. Conversely, have an off-day and with a suitably Gallic shrug, confess *j'étais collé au goudron* (I was stuck in tar). Alternatively, il pédale avec les oreilles (he is pedalling with his ears) comically evokes the gait of the rider who is flagging, his head flapping from side to side. Brilliant.



"The French language can imbue even the most mundane with a far more exotic resonance"



Even more leftfield is *la chasse-patate*, which means 'potato hunt' — a wonderful term used to describe a rider stuck in that no-man's-land between the *echappé* (the breakaway) and the chasing peloton. Somehow, despite no apparent connection with cycling, it perfectly sums up the desperate pointlessness of his or her predicament.

The French language can also imbue the mundane with a far more exotic resonance when used in a cycling context. Take *bidon* as a simple example, which in French simply describes an everyday vessel for transporting water. Add a little Gallic embellishment and you have a *bidon au miel* (bottle of honey), which describes every dropped riders' favourite, the 'sticky bottle' proffered from their team car.

Then there is *domestique*, which suggests a life in servitude, yet in a cycling context defines the role of the anonymous heroes of the peloton, prepared to bury themselves into the



road each day, in loyal support of their team leader.

Sometimes, the subtleties of a foreign language can find no English meaning. In his introduction to Michael Barry's book on his life in the professional peloton, *Le Métier*, David Millar eruditely explains the meaning of the title. *Métier* was a word he heard often during his first year of racing in France, but it had no literal translation.

Over the years, however, he learnt to understand its meaning: "Le Métier is the sacrifice, savoir-faire, and passion that makes professional cycling different from most other sports as it requires the athlete to give, in virtually every facet of his life," he concluded.

Cycling cannot claim a monopoly on the use of *le metier* but Millar's explanation illustrates how a single word can encapsulate the career experiences of the professional cyclist. There are other words that make no sense to anyone outside the sport, but say *puncheur* or *grimpeur* to a cyclist, and they know exactly the character of the rider you are talking about.

A touch of French

Interestingly, the only area of cycling that remains relatively immune from the influx of foreign words is in the bicycle itself. (Admittedly, 'cassette', 'pedal' and

'derailleur' are derived from the French, but they can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*).

Maybe this is due to the fact that early French and British bicycle manufacturers were developing at the same time and rate and had no need to borrow words from one another? Or maybe the bicycle workshops, independent from the language of the Continental peloton, offered the last bastion of Anglo-Saxon resistance to the allure of fancy foreign words. Why say guidon de vélo when handlebar will do just nicely, and how many bike mechanics would want or need to know their contre-écrou from their pignon?

The assimilation of French words into our cycling dictionary shows no sign of abating, as anyone who watched the Tour de France on the Côte de Jenkin Road in Sheffield last year will testify. English companies routinely use French words and expressions or names of famous climbs — *vélo* is everywhere, *Rouleur* is read, Ventoux socks, *grimpeur* caps and *souplesse* jerseys are worn and you can even book a cycling holiday with Col Conquerors!

Give a brand or a product a name derived from the lexicon of French cycling and it immediately strikes a chord and connection with the road cyclist, hinting at the history and the epic nature of the sport that we all, consciously or not, buy into.

Team Sky may attempt to anglicise the vocabulary we use, but I would bet that the majority of their core fan base hold a preference for *le mot d'origine*.

British road cyclists will continue to drink from their *bidons*, admire the tenacity of the *baroudeur* and, on those wonderful days when you have *fourmis dans les jambes*, you may even surprise yourself, and certainly your fellow cyclists, by farting the devil's own fire!

It may be over 30 years since a French rider wore the *maillot jaune* in Paris, but one thing even Sir David Brailsford will have to accept, when it comes to *Le Jargon Cycliste*, no amount of marginal gains is going to relieve the French of this supremacy.

Language barrier

Parlez-vous English?

While the French may still monopolise *Le Jargon Cycliste*, it seems their new generation of riders are nonetheless being hampered by a language problem. "The problem with the French is that they don't speak enough English." If those words came from anyone other than a French academic, they'd be considered borderline xenophobic. As it is, they came from FDJ performance director Fred Grappe, who is also director of the Centre of Sport Performance Optimisation at University of Franche-Comte in Besancon.

"The biggest change we had in the FDJ team this winter was the arrival of Steve Morabito [a Swiss from BMC], not so much as a road captain or his experience — which are both important — but because he's able to communicate with the whole peloton, no matter what language they speak.

"If you go around and ask how many directeur sportifs in French teams speak English, there aren't many," Grappe continues. "The support staff are the same and most of the riders are too. So the French guys stick together in the bunch and they don't or can't communicate, which means they don't always pick up on what is going on so quickly.

"So now Steve talks to other riders in the bunch in English, Italian, whatever, and relays the information. In my experience, if a British rider joins a French team, he tries to learn to speak French. French guys don't seem to learn English, they prefer to stick together."

The era when French was the dominant language of the peloton is long gone. Given the influx into the pro peloton of riders from all over the world, anglophones from North America and Australia as well as riders from the old Soviet Bloc, it's no surprise that English has pushed French out.

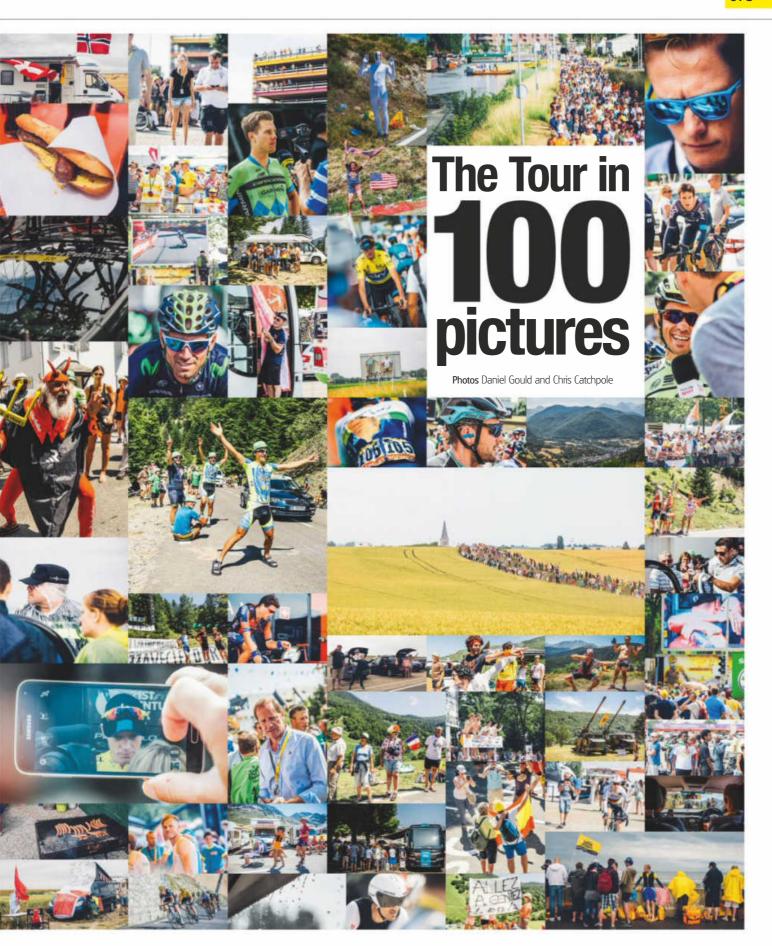
The peloton has adapted, though the French and francophone teams are coming to terms with the new linguistic reality. Frenchman Serge Beucherie is directeur sportif at Swiss team IAM Cycling, a team based in the French-speaking Romandie region.

"Three years ago, when the team was set up, we held team meetings in French and we translated it into English for people who didn't speak French. Now, the meetings are in English and we translate them into French."

For a nation as proud and protective of its linguistic heritage as France, this change would hurt, but for a French monoglot mini-peloton to be handicapping itself is more serious. It's one thing to bemoan the loss of linguistic dominance, it's another thing again to see your chances of racing success diminished by your inability to understand what's going on around you.

TOUR STORIES





pat at, heckled, urine thrown over him, booed. Away from the racing, the road to Chris Froome's second historic Tour de France victory and Team Sky's third in four years was far from an easy one.

When Froome crossed the line atop Alpe d'Huez on the penultimate day in the Tour, his victory in the yellow jersey assured upon safely arriving in Paris, it's no wonder he looked relieved. Relieved not only to have prevented Nairo Quintana overhauling him in the lead on the race's final climb, but also to have made it through some of the most testing weeks of his career.

"It's overwhelming," he said. "It feels as if we've been up against everything."

As well as the battles on the road, the 2013 Tour winner has had to contend with allegations of doping throughout the three weeks, trial by Twitter, abuse from spectators and a tough stance from the media, particularly in France where some commentators have questioned the validity of his performances.

Vitriol

Throughout the race Sky and Froome have strenuously denied any wrongdoing and there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest any different. That did not, however, stop pockets of anti-Sky rhetoric building during the three weeks of the Tour. The vitriol towards the team and its leader was enough for race organiser ASO and the UCI to step in and call on people to "respect every rider, and the integrity of the riders and in particular the yellow jersey".

The hostility hit a peak when
Froome had a cup of urine thrown in his
face and was called a doper on stage 14
to Mende. A week later, while climbing
La Toussuire, video footage showed a
man spitting at him. His team-mates
reported abuse, too: Richie Porte said he
was punched in the ribs by someone on
stage 10, Luke Rowe said he was also
spat on, and during the latter half of the
race there was a more visible police
presence around the Team Sky bus. On
the penultimate day, video footage from
inside one of their team cars showed it
being heckled and pelted as it







passed through the 'Dutch corner' on Alpe d'Huez.

Abuse from fans on the roadside is nothing new at the Tour; Peter Kennaugh and Mark Cavendish were both victims of it in 2013, and with an estimated 12 million people watching the race the vast majority were respectful.

But it still left a discordant note on the team's Tour win.

"It has been disrespectful, to come under the criticism and for people to say the things they have said about him with no foundation," Team Sky principal Sir Dave Brailsford said of Froome after the final stage in Paris.

"They should go and spend their time sitting at the side of Loch Ness and wait for a monster. It's the same thing. We have still got people camping outside with binoculars saying: 'I'm sure we are going to see the monster tomorrow'. But it never appears.

"You can't prove him negative, but there is a weight of evidence to show that we are doing it the right way; we are a clean team and Chris Froome is just a fantastic champion."

"The trailblazing team was cast in the role of villain, surrounded by suspicion"

The ghost of cycling past

So where has the criticism of Sky come from? Since the squad burst onto the scene in 2009 with Brailsford promising to win the Tour within five years with a clean rider, a looming black and blue bus in tow, a big-budget sponsor and a new way of doing things — from using rollers post-race to having their chef travel around in a fully-stocked kitchen motorhome at this year's race — the team has not always garnered popularity on the Continent and in the Tour's homeland. And although many of their practices are now commonplace among the rest of the cycling ranks, at this year's Tour, the trailblazing team, which prides itself on doing things differently, was cast in the role of villain, surrounded by suspicion and doubt.

Also to Froome's detriment was the fact that the ghost of cycling's doping-

Above: J'accuse! The froideur between Chris Froome, giving an interview and Laurent Jalabert, right, who questioned his integrity, is evident

fuelled past still looms large. Many can't believe cyclists can be riding clean and, as such, all of Froome's performances were scrutinised in detail.

Comparisons were made between Sky and Lance Armstrong's US Postal team, in the way the men in blue and black dominated and controlled the racing and their 'robotic' style. But in particular, it was Froome's victory on stage 10 this year, where he accelerated away from his rivals with 6.5km to go on La-Pierre-Saint-Martin, which proved to be a point of contention among the French media in particular. He put 64 seconds into Quintana on the climb, almost three minutes into Alberto Contador and 4.25 into last year's victor Vincenzo Nibali, in a move described as 'Armstrong-esque'.

Former pro rider Laurent Jalabert, a commentator on France 2 television, said of Froome's performance during live coverage: "It feels a little uncomfortable seeing the ease of Sky when contrasted with the distress experienced by the first three of the Tour last year."

Two days later another ex-pro, Michael Rasmussen, similarly questioned Geraint Thomas's ability — with his track racing past — to nullify Nairo Quintana's attacks on stage 12.

"It's really disappointing," Froome said of Jalabert and similar critics, before tweeting the Frenchman directly, after he was questioned on ITV and denied making the comments.

"These guys are setting the tone for the public, for the fans," added Froome.

Many people were conned when Armstrong and other pros maintained their innocence only to subsequently admit doping. It is right people should ask questions so that history does not repeat itself. Yet, today's riders should not be punished for mistakes that happened before them.

Arguably, the likes of Rasmussen and Jalabert — who both tested positive (the latter retrospectively) — know no different having raced in the era where doping was commonplace.

"You can kind of see why [there's scrutiny], I guess," said Geraint Thomas after stage 14, "but if you ride well you're accused of that. In tennis or football, if you produce a really good performance, nobody questions that.

"I'm not saying they're doing anything wrong, but it's sad that if you ride a bike well, people say you're cheating."

Sky leaks

In a bid to end the speculation surrounding Froome, on the second rest day of the race Sky went against one of their policies by revealing Froome's power data from his stage 10 ride.



A week earlier, Brailsford announced Sky's computers had been hacked and confidential data stolen by critics convinced their rider was doping. That same day a video was posted online under the name 'Sky leaks' showing Froome's Mont Ventoux winning ride in the 2013 Tour, with his supposed data overlaid to show his performance was not natural. A second video was then released with Froome riding at the Vuelta last year — though the data was never proven to be real or where it had come from corroborated.

Brailsford was then said to be furious when he was invited on French TV after stage 14, only for French physiology

Above: End of the road. Dave Brailsford congratulates Chris Froome in Paris

Below: Confessed doper Michael Rasmussen expressed 'surprise' at Sky's performances expert Pierre Sallet to "ambush" him with his estimations of Froome's power output, after analysing the stage 10 climb. The figures presented were the kinds only achieved through doping and labelled "abnormal", and Armstrong's image was displayed next to Froome in the broadcast. After this Brailsford asked Tim Kerrison, Sky's head of athlete performance, to reveal what he said were their numbers so people could "judge for themselves".

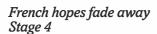
Froome has for his part, spoken of wanting to work with the UCI for more transparency in the sport. When the data was revealed, he and Brailsford said that Team Sky would be willing to hand over all their data to the World Anti-Doping Agency or the UCI experts, if other teams did the same. Similarly, he said during the Tour he would be prepared to undergo physiological testing to help prove that he was clean.

When he stood on the podium in Paris having won his second Tour, Froome spoke of never wanting to "dishonour" the yellow jersey. "I understand its history, good and bad, and I will always respect it, never dishonour it and I'll always be proud to have won it," he said.

"This race is so big, what can I say? It's hard to express the feelings in my heart. It was a very, very hard Tour this year, on the bike and off it. I'm too emotional to say much. It was difficult, there was some stress, but I didn't get too angry."







French hopes were high coming into this year's Tour, but they were more or less done for by the end of stage four. As the main contenders cancelled each other out over the unfamiliar terrain of northern France's pavé roads, Thibaut Pinot saw his challenge fall to pieces. Already three minutes down after stage three, he cut a frustrated figure as he stood at the side of the road waiting for assistance from his team. Later in the stage, obviously unhappy with his machine, he stopped, climbed off and stood at the side of the road, refusing to take a bike from a team-mate.

By the end of the day Pinot was over six minutes down on his GC rivals and the dreams of a nation were crushed for another year.





TOUR IN STATS

While most riders take a well-earned rest, we have done a number on the world's greatest cycling race

Words Daniel Ostanek Photos Graham Watson, Yuzuru Sunada, Russell Ellis, Offside/L'Equipe





Peter Sagan may not have won a stage during the Tour, but his 11 top-five finishes meant that he eased to victory in the points

classification for the fourth year in succession.



2.03million

The total prize money in euros on offer at this year's Tour. Team Sky's haul totalled €556,630 (£391,031), with €450,000 of that coming from Chris Froome's overall victory. At the other end of the standings, Australian team Orica-GreenEdge took home just €10,940.

37°C

The hottest temperature recorded on a stage this year was during the Pyrenean mountain stage from Lannemezan to Plateau de Beille. Katusha's Joaquim Rodríguez was the victor on the day.

38

The number of riders who didn't make it to the finish of the Tour.
The mass crash on stage three saw the race claim its first victims, while Tinkoff-Saxo's Michael Valgren was the last to go, abandoning on stage 19.

1,550

ASO rents every night of the race, providing accommodation for riders, staff and organisation. No motorhomes here, sorry Team Sky.

109.08kph

The fastest speed recorded during the Tour de France, according to Dimension Data. It was recorded by Astana's Lars Boom as he descended the Côte d'Ereffe 144km into stage three, from Anvers to the Mur de Huy.



78.48kph

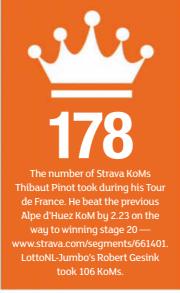
John Degenkolb recorded the fastest sprint of the Tour, at the intermediate sprint in Rancourt midway through stage five.

70.2kph

Four-time stage winner André Greipel's Strava data shows that his fastest sprint came during his second stage win on stage five, from Arras to Amiens.







All the right signals

Tracking the Tour Surrounded by numerous television channels' outside

Surrounded by numerous television channels' outside broadcast trucks in the *zone technique*, adjacent to each stage's finish, Dimension Data's rather modest vehicle barely stood out.

But the work its seven staff did was notable for it being the first real step in improving the quality of the cycling viewing experience.

The South African-based global technology company was behind the live GPS rider tracking website that was launched in the first week of the Tour, as well as the on-screen graphics that television viewers would have noticed throughout the race.

"We hope what we're doing will make cycling fans more knowledgeable about the sport," said the company's technical programme lead, Peter Grey.

Although the real-time tracking website is still very much a work in progress — for example, if a rider changed bikes mid-stage, the lack of transponder on their spare meant they were undetectable — the sheer complexity of the operation and a short turnaround period in which they had to prepare their systems for the Tour makes what they achieved all the more remarkable.

"There's a lot of technology involved," added Grey. "Each rider has an 80-gramme GPS tracker fitted beneath their saddle, the signals from which are transmitted back to vehicles and motorbikes in the race convoy.

"That information is relayed through helicopters to a cherry picker at the finish line, from where our employees on site set about how the data is presented. We also have additional colleagues around the world working to ensure the data is correct and up to date."

Between 1.5 and 2.5 million packets of information were logged and recorded during each stage, all of which the company say they'll store for future reference and comparisons from Tour to Tour.







MTN-Qhubeka's Eritrean duo made history this July, with Daniel Teklehaimanot becoming the first African to ever wear the KoM jersey

Words Sophie Hurcom Photos Yuzuru Sunada, Cor Vos

t the start of stage eight of the Tour in Rennes. around 100 excited fans stand chanting and singing behind the barrier near the team buses. A mass of green, blue and red Eritrean flags are waved high, someone holds an umbrella with 'I heart Eritrea' printed on it and a couple of people are wearing polka-dot jerseys. In the middle of the crowd pictures of Daniel Teklehaimanot and Merhawi Kudus are held aloft — the two MTN riders they are here to cheer on.

The duo are the first Eritrean riders ever to participate in the Tour; Kudus, at 21, was the youngest rider in the race this year, while Teklehaimanot, 26, made history by becoming the first African to wear the polka-dot jersey -he held it for four days - and the first black African to wear any classification jersey at the Tour.

It's been a remarkable three weeks for the two who both ride for MTN-Ohubeka, which itself has had a fairy-tale Tour — wildcard entrants, the African squad is the first from the continent to ever compete in the race, and won their first stage with Steve Cummings in Mende on Mandela Day.

"They've [Teklehaimanot and Kudus] been a bit overwhelmed I think, with all of it," says Douglas Ryder, team principal at MTN. "They didn't understand, and nor did any of us really, the mass and the enormity of the Tour de France.

"And of course they've been motivated by the attention that

they've had across Eritrea — it has been incredible and the interest has been amazing."

Both Teklehaimanot and Kudus come from the East African country where cycling is one of the most popular sports. As well as being a widely used mode of transport, the country has long had its own racing scene, cycling clubs and a fledgling national team, in part due to its past as an Italian colony. Such has been the country's strength in cycling, during its occupation by Ethiopia, Eritrean cyclists competed in the Olympics multiple times under Ethiopian entry.

"At home cycling is really famous," says Kudus. "There are really talented riders in Eritrea — the biggest sport at home is cycling."

Kudus, like Teklehaimanot started cycling competitively in his early teens, and both began competing in local road races using their mountain bikes.

"I watched the Tour de France especially the last six, seven, eight years. I always followed the local races in Eritrea — I was really interested. When I went to school I went on my bike."

It's easy to see how far Kudus has come in such a short space of time when asked who his cycling heroes were growing up — one of them in fact he just rode alongside at the Tour. "When I was watching TV, especially in 2009, it was Andy Schleck and Contador," he says. "I was a supporter of Andy Schleck but I thought they were both really good riders."

African pioneer

Teklehaimanot especially is something of a trailblazer in cycling. As well as being the first African rider to wear the KoM jersey, he was the first rider off the start ramp for the time trial on stage one of the Tour in Utrecht, something Ryder says was a "no brainer for him, and a massive honour". Before the Tour he was the first Eritrean to compete at the Olympics (in 2012) in a sport other than athletics; the first Eritrean to ride in the Vuelta; and the first rider to win a jersey for MTN when he secured the King of the Mountains competition at this year's Criterium du Dauphiné, weeks before the Grand Départ.

But it was on July 9 when Teklehaimanot really wrote his name in the history books at the Tour. He got into a breakaway on stage six, collected all of the points over the day's three climbs to move into the lead in the King of the Mountains competition.

"It is a big step for African cycling and I feel really proud at the moment because I have this jersey," he said at the time. "I am proud to be African and I am proud to be Eritrean. This is a day I will never forget."

For a rider to be thrust into the spotlight, on the sport's biggest showcase like Teklehaimanot has been, he appeared to cope with it well. "I was so happy to have a part of history personally," the towering tall and softly spoken rider told *Cycle Sport*, "and of course the polka-dot jersey is a big one so I've enjoyed the last few days."

However, it hasn't been a simple step to the top of professional cycling for Teklehaimanot. In 2009, he left Eritrea to go to the UCI's World Cycling Centre in Aigle, Switzerland, to pursue his dream of turning professional (something Kudus later did, too). His big break seemed to come a year later when he was signed as a stagiaire for Cervélo Test Team in 2010, but the squad folded shortly after. It was another two years before he signed his first pro contract, with Orica-GreenEdge in 2012; however, visa problems meant that he only raced a handful of times in Europe during 2013.

It was only when MTN-Qhubeka



"It is a big step for African cycling and I feel really proud. This is a day I will never forget"

formed in 2014 and Teklehaimanot joined he seemed to find a team that could help him reach his potential, as well as deal with the bureaucratic issues that had hindered his progress previously.

"I think he realises that there is big pressure on his shoulders as an ambassador for African cycling," says Ryder. "He realises that his conduct and his riding and all that stuff plays a big role in the future of African cycling."

Ryder continues: "He's a complete and utter role model, a fantastic

ambassador. He kind of pioneered African cycling when he left in 2009 to go to the UCI centre in Aigle, so for me it was a dream come true to have him in our team to go to the Tour de France, to be that guy to make that first step."

Fantastic support

The strong support from Eritrean fans on the roadside and back home has clearly been a motivator for both Teklehaimanot and Kudus. As well as the hundreds at the Tour, in Eritrea they







Left: Kudus on the cobbles of stage four of this year's Tour Right: Dreams are made of these: Teklehaimanot makes polka-dot history Below: A sea of colour and warm smiles greet Eritrea's latest hero



have the backing of the public, with television screens being set up in parks to screen the race.

"It was really amazing, especially the first day and today [stage 10]," says Kudus, with a big smile on his face. "The Eritrean flag is everywhere, so still I feel like I can't believe it.

"At home they watch [the Tour] everywhere, in the coffee shop in the cinema, everyone is behind us so it's really good and good for us for motivational support.

"Three weeks ago I went to Eritrea for the National Champs and it was really an awesome welcome. They treated me like an ambassador or some minister at the airport, I was really surprised; I can't believe it," Kudus continues. "It's a big celebration. It is really amazing — I'm really excited to go home."

Teklehaimanot agrees: "It's really good support, it's nice to see these people from home so I think we are really, really happy to see that people are pushing us. It's gonna be crazy now [when we go back home] because after the Tour the people are so, so happy."

Riding the dream

Despite Africa not yet being widely known for its cycling credentials, Eritrea's landscape and the roads that Teklehaimanot and Kudus grew up riding on, are ideal for cycling. Bernard Hinault has said that that Eritreans could be the 'next Colombians' — a nation that produces strong climbers — while Chris Froome, who was born in Kenya and educated in South Africa, predicted East

Africa has potentially some of the "best endurance athletes in the world".

"If you look at Eritrea it has one of the highest cities in Africa, if not the highest capital city in Africa at 2,300 odd metres above sea level," says Ryder. "It's an eastern African [country] and it has a coastline, so it's amazing that it has such mountain ranges.

"Their success and the exposure of African cycling here at the Tour de France will definitely drive other countries, from Ethiopia to Rwanda to Morocco to Egypt to Kenya to kind of think 'maybe we should give this a bash too?' — the transformation of cycling is definitely happening.

"Cycling is a global sport, it's not a European sport, it's not American, it's not Australian, you know, Africa should be involved in it."

Both Teklehaimanot and Kudus made it to Paris on their Tour debuts, and if they weren't already national heroes in their home country, they will surely be when they return, having made history at the highest-profile and most famous event in professional cycling.

"I really feel good, I really feel proud, this is the biggest race in the world so it's not easy. I'm really, really excited," says Kudus.

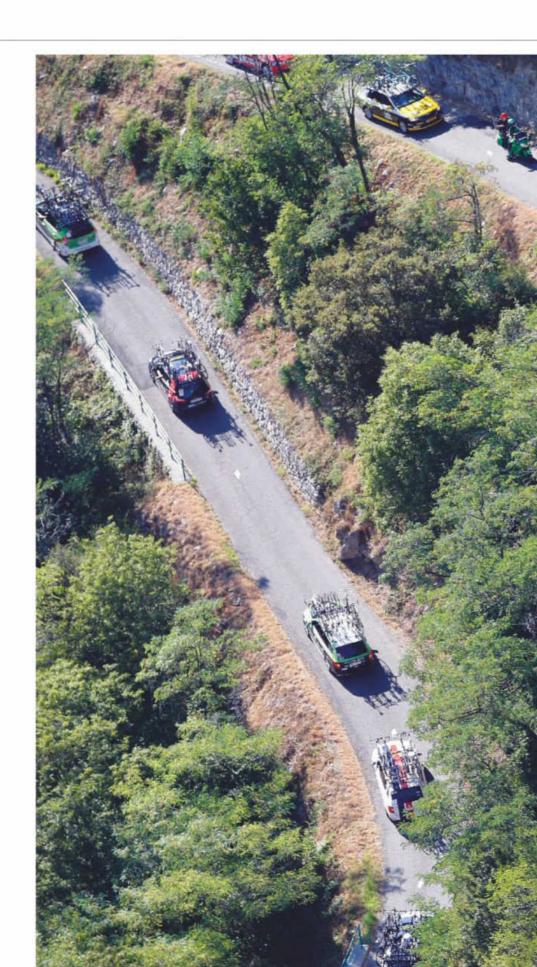
"It's a long time [coming] because when I started [cycling] at home it was when I was young so of course I watched the Tour de France every year," says Teklehaimanot.

"When I became professional in 2012 it was a long-time dream that I was going to be here one day."



It was the most hotly anticipated debut of this year's race. The short climb of Montvernier that snakes impossibly up the side of an Alpine rock face is perhaps the most stunning piece of road to have graced the Tour.

But what translates well into TV footage and still images doesn't always work for a bike race. Devoid of spectators – kept off due to the width of the road and precipitous drops to the side – and with little room for accelerations due to the frequency of the corners, the 3.4km climb was little more than a cosmetic inclusion. But given the little detour provided us with scenes like this, you won't hear us complaining.









SHOWDOWN IN THE ALPS

Four Alpine stages over the final five days pushed **Team Sky** to their very limit

Words Nick Bull Photos Yuzuru Sunada, Russell Ellis

t was on the D526 and D1091, the valley roads that link the Cols du Glandon and Croix de Fer to within touching distance of Alpe d'Huez, that the outcome of this year's Tour de France was finalised.

At the top of the Croix de Fer, the summit of which came almost exactly halfway through the race's relatively short penultimate stage, Chris Froome was isolated. Nairo Quintana had Movistar team-mate Alejandro Valverde for company in the GC group, and Winner Anacona was handily up the road in a counter-attack.

Had geography allowed the race to descend off that climb and straight on to the Alpe, it's unlikely that Geraint Thomas, Richie Porte and Wout Poels would have been able rejoin the GC group en route to the famed mountain and provide Froome with pace-setting assistance on the lower slopes of it.

Struggling with a chest infection,

Froome, had he ridden without support for much longer, would have likely lost the Tour.

In essence, this summed up the Tour's Alpine stages in a matter of kilometres: much excitement, but the same man in yellow come the end.

Moment of truth

A GoPro camera attached to Froome's Pinarello Dogma F8 for the race's final stage around Paris captured what was perhaps his most telling quote of the race. "I'm quite lucky we don't have to do one more stage in the Alps," he remarked to an off-camera rider next to him in the peloton.

While this was not a surprising assessment, Froome's final week deterioration gave credence to Sky's PR-savvy and cautious strategy of taking the race "one day at a time".

Yet it had all looked good for him after the first of the Alpine quartet to the

Pra Loup ski station, a climb that was immortalised in Tour history 40 years ago when Eddy Merckx was famously beaten by French favourite Bernard Thévenet. (Thévenet was sheepisly awarded with a commemorative jersey by Prudhomme and Hinault on the podium post-race).

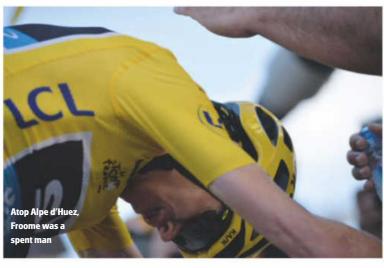
Such was Richie Porte and Nicolas Roche's confidence in Froome that they made that day's breakaway and initially were set to ride for the stage win, a rather un-Sky-like Tour tactic if ever there was one. Porte eventually dropped back to help the yellow jersey, who rode with Quintana to the line while all his other rivals conceded time.

However, as was the case in 2013, Froome came out of the Alps thankful of the advantage he amassed in the race's opening two weeks. His fading condition first became evident on the Lacets de Montvernier, the picturesque 3.4km, 18-hairpinned climb on the outskirts of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, which made its Tour debut on stage 18.

Notably, following attacks from Vincenzo Nibali and Alberto Contador towards the top of the climb, it was Thomas who looked more comfortable responding than did his leader; granted, Froome did not concede any time.

Sky dodged a bullet again the following day to La Toussuire, which will be forever remembered for the spat between Nibali and Froome, and the former's supposedly deliberate attack seconds after the maillot jaune suffered a mechanical.

Sky's defence was threadbare: Thomas was distanced on the Croix de Fer (climbed the same way as the riders went down it the following day



towards the Alpe) and lost his fourth spot on GC, Porte and Roche looked tired, and only the first of two brilliant performances from Poels prevented Quintana from gaining more than the half a minute he did on Froome.

As per the stage to Alpe d'Huez, geography was on Sky's side: the 40km between the stage's first climb, the Col du Chaussy, and the Croix de Fer, as well as the long distance between the latter and La Toussuire, effectively deterred Quintana from going long.

And while Froome's performance on the Alpe had numerous Sky personnel concerned that he was about the lose the Tour 24 hours before Paris — it was a "cover your eyes-type experience, at times", one told *Cycle Sport* — Quintana hasn't ever gained anything close to 2.38 on Froome in a single Tour stage, which is what he needed to do to take yellow.

Course masterstroke

Although Froome's body might say otherwise, ASO's including four Alpine stages in the race's final five days proved to be a masterstroke. These stages were the last chance saloon for those riders and teams in desperate need of salvaging a result or two from the race. The winners of each came from four different teams hitherto without a win in the 2015 race.

Nibali's victory at La Toussuire was a matter of honour after his subpar defence of his title. French riders Romain Bardet and Thibaut Pinot got in on the act, too, having morphed into crazed attackers after likewise seeing their GC dreams disappear in the race's opening week.

Bardet described the atmosphere on the stage he won (18, into Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne) as like that of a football stadium; even 200m after the finish line, the four-deep crowds were whipped into a frenzy by his arrival. Not even visiting former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was afforded such applause.

Pinot also drew football comparisons after winning atop the Alpe. He claimed that fan support on the climb was like that in the Parc des Princes, where his beloved Paris Saint-Germain play.



Having waited 25 years between Bernard Hinault and Pierre Rolland's wins on the climb, the French have now won the last three Tour stages to end on the Alpe. Perhaps it's time for the locals to reclaim Dutch corner, and replace the Europop and cheap lager with Johnny Hallyday and vin rouge.

There was one Alpine climb that was comparatively quiet: Montvernier. Included in stage 18, its extremely narrow nature resulted in spectators being banned from the majority of the climb. Not that Froome noticed, so hard was he pushing. "Now I think back to it, it felt a little bit strange," he said.

The aerial television pictures of the climb looked spectacular, and it's a hill





Above: Sky came under pressure on the Croix de Fer as Valverde and then Quintana attacked

Left: Alpe agony! Froome digs deep to limit his losses to Ouintana that is likely to feature more regularly in the Tour. Yet, for some, its sheer beauty and abundance of pre-race hype distorted its reputation somewhat.

"I think for us riders, climbs like the [Col du] Glandon... are more mythical," said MTN-Qhubeka's Serge Pauwels, who placed sixth on the stage. "People talk about it mainly because it gives nice television views."

It proved to be the climb on which Movistar's hopes of winning the Tour received their first significant boost. But the showdown between Froome and Quintana that ignited at sea level in the Netherlands on stage two ultimately ended a few hundred metres closer to the clouds as they neared the Alpe.

Dutch corner chaos

The extraordinary final act

You don't need a ticket to watch the Tour. You get a good view through dedication, not money. A climb like Alpe d'Huez is a pilgrimage. If you spent the few days before the Tour arrived sitting outside a café in Bourg d'Oisans at the foot of that particular mountain, you could watch a stream of campervans, cars, cyclists with panniers and hikers with rucksacks heading off up the steep climb, and not coming back.

Everyone sits up there, drinking, listening to excruciating music, played loudly enough to be detected on a seismograph, and waiting.

The morning of the stage is the start of the extraordinary final act. From dawn onwards, the trickle of cyclists and walkers swells to a river of every kind of fan, from pensioners to small children, from sensibly dressed French families to a beered-up Welsh stag-do in mankinis. All heading for the sky.

Riding up the hill among the crowd is like being in two different parties at once. There is the moving festival of riders, who range from ex-pros thundering up the hill as if they're in the race, to seven- and eight-year old children, proudly riding up the climb with their

parents, determined to get as far as they can.

And there is the static festival of those who've already found their spot and made it their own — Dutch corner, Irish corner, even, this year, Welsh corner, for Team Sky's Geraint Thomas and Luke Rowe (and their boss, Sir Dave Brailsford).

Both festivals are all about cycling. There is a constant stream of Tour-accredited cars and trucks trying to get to the finish line, but they have to do it at bike pace, assuming the crowd lets them through at all. If anyone in a car leaves a window open, something will be thrown through it — water, beer, ketchup, even (once, at any rate) a plate of spaghetti Bolognese.

When the race arrives... there is nothing like it. There is noise, a blur of colours. The press of fans forms a shouting, singing beer-breathing tunnel of humanity up the middle of the road for the riders to negotiate.

Occasionally, it all gets to be a bit much and the intensity can take over. Things can happen that really shouldn't. But when the race is on the Alpe, and the Alpe is at its best, it's a moment of ecstasy for everyone involved.











Above: The Motorola team pay their respects to their fallen colleague before resuming the 1995 Tour **Right:** Casartelli's parents, Rosa and Sergio, flank his son

Marco at his memorial in Col de Portet d'Aspet



to win a stage — perhaps the one to Limoges, stage 18.

Aldag was racing for a rival team, Telekom, during the 1995 Tour and passed while the 24 year old remained motionless on the tarmac after his crash.

"A guy from Kelme made a strange move before that left turn. He kicked out, panicked. I slowed down, I saw him lying there," Aldag says.

"We kept on going, but I was immediately shocked. In a long valley afterwards a car came up. I was in the group with his team-mate Lance Armstrong. We were told that it looks really bad and that he's probably dead.

"I was riding and thinking that hopefully it's not true, that it can't be. The tarmac was melting and I did not know how we were ever going to get to the finish line."

A sport in mourning

Casartelli's wife Annalisa was watching the race at home on

television. She first learned that her husband had been in an accident via Italy's RAI coverage.

His parents Sergio and Rosa called the team doctor, Max Testa, who went directly to the hospital in Tarbes. Testa saw through the window of the emergency room that Casartelli's cardiac frequency had gone flat on the monitor. He called them back and made sure they were both on the telephone line to tell them the terrible news.

"The medics shocked him a few times because he had a cardiac arrest, but mainly the damage [was] in his brain," Testa says

"Fabio fractured the base of the neck and one fragment of the bone cut an artery, so he had internal brain bleeding."

Richard Virenque won the stage in Cauterets without knowing what had happened behind him. That night Ochowicz called a meeting with the team to decide whether or not they would continue.

"It wasn't easy. It was a decision that I didn't make alone," he says. "We reached out to Annalisa and the Casartelli family, we asked her what she thought we should do. I sat down with the team at the Campanile Hotel in Tarbes. We all agreed to continue. We wore black patches and kept his bike on the car roof all the way to Paris."

"I remember those days well," BMC Racing sports director and former professional, Italian Max Sciandri says.

"Motorola and our team, MG-Technogym, were in the same hotel for two nights, and on the rest day Fabio came out training with us. We spent his last day together before the incident.

"We talked quite a bit because I had ridden for Motorola, and being half-Italian/half-English, we chatted about the team and the people on it. What stuck out was the sh*t hotel, and we had to eat in this separate room. This guy came with big tray of

meat, and he lost control and the oil and broth poured down the back of this girl who was with [team director] Giancarlo Ferretti. I remember laughing and seeing Fabio laugh."

Ochowicz worked with the Casartelli family and race organiser ASO to set up a fund for Marco and to create a monument for the Olympic champion. All the prize money for the following day's stage — where the Motorola team crossed the line ahead of the peloton, side by side — was donated and they received donations throughout 1995.

Marco, now 20, is studying language at a university in Italy. He looks just like his father, with the same large grin and dark curly hair. On the roadside during this year's race, he translated from Italian to English and back, so that Sergio and Rosa could speak with Ochowicz.

"I'm not his godfather, but a bit like a guardian. I've done it for 20 years, looking after him and seeing the family twice a year," says Ochowicz.

"Marco has no memories, it's hard for him. He sees pictures but can't remember holding his father's hand for the last time. I think Fabio would've been happy with the outcome of his wife's life and his son's growth as a man."

Cycling remains dangerous

Bike racing has inherent dangers and each time a tragic incident occurs changes are made to make it a little safer. After Casartelli's death some changes came quickly, like the removal of the roadside cement blocks, while others came more slowly.

It was not until Andrei Kivilev died in the 2003 Paris-Nice that the move to make helmets obligatory began in earnest. "The sport has changed a lot," says Ochowicz. "It was a wake-up call; what happed to him was so bizarre."

Since the Tour began in 1903 only two cyclists have died during the race, Briton Tom Simpson in 1967 and Casartelli.

"This generation is more into safety, they have better education, they know about this; you see everyone wears helmets all the time, even in training," Testa says.

"They know about Fabio, but any athlete in any sport knows that there is some potential risk. If you look at the numbers, the big numbers, you'd see that this was an exceptional event... if you count the hours of activity and the events per hour — 200 riders, the hours, the days, the years — it's still relatively low compared to other sports."

Sean Yates rode for Motorola in that Tour, but abandoned two days before Casartelli's crash. As one of the team's captains, he went to Albese con Cassano to carry Casartelli's coffin to the church and his final resting place.

"Going to the funeral was very emotional; he had a young kid," Yates says.

"The Italians are emotional people, the music and this and that. It was quite moving, it pulled out emotions, and I normally don't show them."

Yates, now a directeur sportive with Tinkoff-Saxo, has to think about how to help the likes of Alberto Contador and Peter Sagan stay safe while trying to win in pressured circumstances.

"The essential element has remained the same, you are

"Fabio would've been happy with his wife's life and his son's growth as a man"

riding along on little tyres and on roads that are sometimes not safe. I remember thinking when I was going down the road at 100k an hour: 'If I have a blow-out now, I'm dead'. But that didn't stop me going 100k an hour."

Now, teams with GC contenders push to the front during the crucial part of the stages to stay safe. On flat stages, you can see four to five teams line up alongside the sprint teams heading into a sprint finish. Twenty years ago, Yates says, the likes of Miguel Indurain or Marco Pantani would be happy riding at the back of the pack until the high mountains. "Now, we have a lot of information coming back over race radio, and we try to tell them about dangers via the ear pieces," Yates says.

"It's funny," adds Sciandri, "you try to be more aware of safety, but then you have more and more road furniture, poles, vases... It's tough to be a bike rider, going 60k an hour through towns. There is awareness, but the road conditions make it harder and harder."

As it does every year, the 2015 Tour saw its share of crashes. Most riders picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and got back on their bikes. Others weren't so lucky and were forced to abandon, but most importantly they all survived.

It seems that memories of Casartelli may be fading as the generations change and times move on, but the risks cyclists take and the dangers they face still exist in the Tour de France.

Below: Fabio Casartelli wins the road race gold at the '92 Olympics in Barcelona









Dutch corner Stage 20

The French Alps are the spiritual home of the Tour de France, one of two mountain ranges that feature each year, and the one that brings the fans out in their thousands. No other mountain does this better than Alpe d'Huez. Not the most beautiful climb, not even the toughest the riders face, it is nonetheless the one that draws the most, and most excitable, fans each time it's included.

Dutch corner, or hairpin number 7, has become a two-day party zone with DJs, a makeshift bar and questionable fancy dress. Anyone who cycles through this short section of tarmac — including those who just ride past on their way to vantage points higher up the mountain — gets a huge cheer. For the leaders, it passes in a blur of noise and suffering, while the autobus at the back passes through in a tightly knit group.

Those in-between who pass in small groups are the ones who get to enjoy it the most, high-fiving the fans, cheering back — like Steve Cummings here — or even sampling the beer. There is no other fan experience like this in sport.



The eyes have it

Bernard Hinault had a single-minded determination to win the Tour de France and a primal connection to his countrymen

Words Richard Abraham Photos Daniel Gould, Offside/L'Equipe, Cor Vos

t's in the eyes. Thirty years have passed since they surveyed the view of the Champs-Elysées from the top step of the Tour de France podium for the last time, but while the thick black hair has thinned and the bantamweight frame has sagged, Bernard Hinault's gaze has lost none of its clout.

"You could see it in his look," recalls recently retired Tour speaker of 40 years, Daniel Mangeas when *Cycle Sport* asks him about his memories of Hinault. "He was a killer!"

He still is. Just one glance is still enough to make grown men quake in

their boots. Blokes well into their forties approach him to ask for an autograph and in just a few paces revert back to being the little boys they were when they watched Hinault race — awestruck and intimidated by the man they called 'the Badger'.

"He's stayed the same as he was when he was a rider," says Marc Madiot, a rider in the Hinault peloton and now manager of FDJ. "He's always up for a fight."

New cage, same Badger

To interview Hinault, *Cycle Sport* has taken a seat on flimsy plastic chairs in the quietest corner of the Tour's start

village; it's still deafeningly loud, either side of a table which happens to have a bright, old-fashioned bakelite telephone between us. It's an odd, sitcom-esque setting to interview the greatest living French cyclist. Much has changed about the Tour since 1985, the last time Hinault was top dog in the world's biggest bike race. He's now an ambassador for ASO, and the Breton still looks across the table with the authority of someone who knows he's a big deal. *Naturellement*, he only gives interviews in French.

"It feels a long time ago, but not long ago, at the same time," Hinault says of 1985. "When you look back in time, 30 years is enormous. When you're a professional cyclist it feels like it was only yesterday."

Now 60, the Badger has been caged in a red Skoda and suited and booted in a blue shirt and beige chinos, let out to meet and greet various dignitaries, mayors and journalists. Very occasionally they let him out to indulge his other passion: forcibly ejecting someone from somewhere they shouldn't have got to.

Hinault is a constant reminder that the French used to dominate their Tour. Cycling loves to romanticise the past, and his current role is a shrewd way of linking the modern, English-





speaking Tour with its grainy, idealised francophone former glory. His purposeful strides around the Tour de France start village and VIP areas scream: "Hey, don't forget, once upon a time we used to be good at this ourselves!"

French longing

Of course, 30 years is a long time and the weight of succeeding Hinault has rested heavily on the shoulders of every top French rider since. France has been waiting a generation for its new champion. The nearest any of its sons has come to winning the Tour in those intervening years is Laurent Fignon, who finished second by eight seconds to Greg LeMond in 1989.

Hinault himself came second in 1986 (although that's another story) but since Fignon only Richard Virenque (second in 1997) and Jean-Christophe Péraud (second in 2014) have come within one step of the coveted yellow jersey.

"I was tapping out a huge tempo in the first week, showing them I was there"

Hinault was part of that long-extinct breed of Tour winners that were all-rounders. He would contest sprint finishes as eagerly as he would mountain-top summits. You might think this is not too dissimilar to current GC riders, but remember that whenever current GC contenders are to be found in the top 10 on sprint stages, they are there because they are looking to keep out of trouble. Hinault, you get the feeling, was there to make it.

"Across the whole of Hinault's career, from time to time he would just bang his fist on the table to remind everyone that he was still there," adds Madiot. "When he did that, once he'd

Above: Hinault nailed the overall at the final time trial of '85 around Lac de Vassivière, finishing five seconds behind stage winner and team-mate LeMond Right: LeMond soon learned that he was riding to support Hinault, regardless of any agreement to the contrary

put everyone back in their place, all was good. C'etait bon!"

That 1985 Tour, the fifth victory that elevated him into cycling's Mount Olympus alongside Eddy Merckx and Jacques Anquetil, was nothing less than Hinault in a three week nutshell.

He'd just turned 30 and was returning to full strength after a persistent knee injury had ruined his previous seasons and seen him humiliated by Fignon in the 1984 Tour. He'd already won the Giro and announced that he would retire in 1986, and so when the Tour started in his home region of Brittany, "in my own back garden", as Hinault recalls it, he wasn't going to let the opportunity pass him by — to make a statement: the Badger wasn't dead.

"That was exactly what I showed in that first week," he remembers. When I was tapping out a huge tempo in the first week, the rest of the bunch realised, 'oh, there he is'.

Team orders

LeMond: duped and deceived

On stage 17, finishing at Luz Ardiden, Hinault's Tour almost came undone. His biggest GC threat Stephen Roche broke away on the penultimate Col du Tourmalet with Pedro Delgado and Hinault's team-mate Greg LeMond. The American, who felt he could win the stage, was refused permission to attack. Team tactics — and misinformation — had saved Hinault's Tour, with the Frenchman all but confessing to this when he promised to help the American win the race the following year. LeMond tells *Cycle Sport* what he remembers from that day.

"I think [team manager] Paul Koechli came up to me and told me I couldn't ride with Roche. The idea that I was riding with Roche was crazy in itself, because I know exactly what I would have done, I would have watched what he did and I would have attacked. I said, 'where's Hinault?' He said he was just behind, and I said, 'well how far behind?' And he said it was 45 seconds behind. Maybe I misunderstood it and he actually said four to five minutes. But if it was four to five minutes, I would have thought the race was over for him.

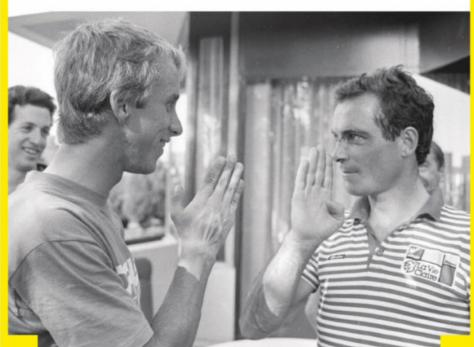
"In the confusion I decided to wait and there was a second group came up with Phil Anderson, Sean Kelly, a group of about 18 riders. And Hinault wasn't there. He would probably have been about two minutes behind that peloton, which meant he was four or five minutes.

"I said afterwards, 'man, I was lied to'. I was deceived and lied to. I wasn't really thinking of Hinault at the time; I was really thinking about Koechli and I couldn't understand what his motivation was and why he had to lie to me.

"I later realised the team lied to make sure that Hinault won, and that I was never part of the deal. My understanding when I signed up to that team was that I would be given the green light to go for the victory. I told Bernard Tapie [team owner] that he lied to me and he said, 'don't worry Greg, you're right but we'll race for you next year no matter which way it goes. We just wanted to make sure that we got first and second.'

"Hinault was a very good team-mate and he treated me and all of his team-mates well, and I had a lot of respect for him. So I reverted back into the role of the domestique on the Col d'Aubisque stage. I remember that Roche attacked again and I physically pushed Hinault for hundreds of metres to stay with him. He would have lost yellow again that day. And I was riding incredibly well, I think much stronger than Roche. I had this default loyalty that he or nobody else had, or if they did it wasn't towards me.

"I don't take any of it personally against Hinault, I look at it as the environment. I think that to me it always falls down to the leadership of the team."



"The most important thing was showing that I was there; right from the start."

Show of strength

He battered himself and everyone else in the opening week. While he couldn't climb with the best of them in the Alps—the Colombians Luis Herrera and Fabio Parra won the opening two mountain stages to Morzine-Avoriaz and Lans-en-Vercors—Hinault had ridden his fragile South American trailblazing adversaries out of the Tour over the cobbles in northern France.

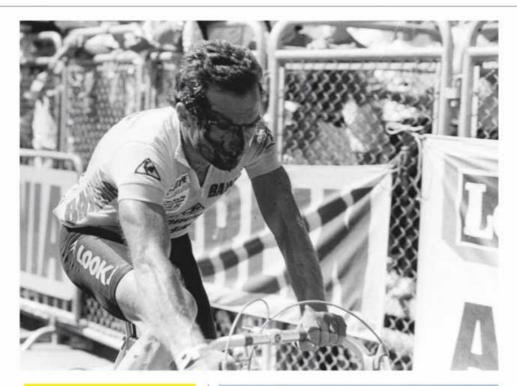
He also benefited from 139 miles of time trialling (Hinault would have been eighth overall without them). His La Vie Claire team, which began in 1985, was not only one of the strongest squads in the peloton but also one of the most scientifically advanced. Beginning with Renault team boss Cyrille Guimard, Hinault had adopted delta bars, deep section wheels, scientific aerodynamic bike fitting and, for the first time in 1985, Look's brand new clipless pedal system. On stage eight's 75km time trial he smashed the field to smithereens. A gap of 22 seconds separated riders from second to fifth place. Hinault beat them all by over two minutes.

Aggressive, dominant and apparently unbeatable; the 1985 Tour was going swimmingly for Hinault. That was, until it reached Saint-Etienne.

Single-minded

Looking back on photographs of the stage finish in Saint-Etienne, you notice those eyes again. Framed by blood coagulating around his cheekbones and dripping down his jowls like face paint, Hinault has the look of a man possessed. He'd crashed hard in the final few hundred metres, brought down by a touch of wheels, and his sunglasses ("I had an expensive pair worth 1,200 francs at the time. If I'd had a plastic pair on I would have been fine," he recalled in a recent interview with *Le Parisien*) had shattered in his face

"I crossed the line," Hinault remembers. "The first thing I thought when I crashed was, the rules of the Tour de France say that when you



"My head wasn't broken, so I carried on"

crash in the final kilometre you get given the same time as the others. I knew that.

"So I was sat on the pavement, I had a good look at my head, it wasn't broken, good, and so I carried on. But I took my time about it."

Hinault's handling of the situation demonstrates that famous single-minded sangfroid. As he did for much of his career, Hinault took his time, thought about what he was going to do, and then did it.

"I remember that day. In the evening he was still OK but we were scared to come down the next morning," recalls Kim Andersen, Hinault's team-mate on La Vie Claire in 1985 and wearer of the yellow jersey for four stages of that Tour.

"But then we came down and he was the first guy sitting at the breakfast table, as if to say, 'f***, I'm ready, it doesn't matter what."

Force of nature

The press and public like to characterise Hinault as a raging, angry man who would storm into a bike race like a whirlwind and dominate from start to finish. He's the angry Breton who would



punch striking workers blockading the 1984 Paris-Nice, and turn up to breakfast with a broken nose, a grin on his face, and two fingers up to the people who doubted he could carry on.

The Badger follows Hinault around. Reportedly born of Breton slang for 'mate,' the feisty little animal just seems to fit Hinault's cycling career and persona like a glove. It's true that, on two wheels and on form, Hinault was a force of nature. Out of the 13 Grand Tours he started, he won 10 of them, finished second twice, and abandoned

Top: Hinault crosses the line, face bleeding after crashing inside the final kilometre Above: The stylish designer glasses that could have blinded the Badger; he wore plastic ones thereafter Main: Entertaining the peloton; Hinault was as charismatic as he was terrifying



just once. He won editions of all three, plus cobbled Classics, hilly Classics, and the World Championships. The man himself of course likes to play up to his reputation too, but the reality is more complex than it first appears.

Fundamental

The 1985 Tour is a case in point. Hinault could, and perhaps should, have lost that Tour de France (see boxout). Arguably, he wasn't the strongest rider in the race at all. Somehow he doggedly clung on.

"He obviously had talent but he could take a lot of pain," says Andersen. "He was scared of nothing."

"He's black and white; this is how I do it," says Greg LeMond, Hinault's team-mate on La Vie Claire in 1985 and runner up in the Tour. "There's no grey area for him.



"He was incredibly strong but I think he succeeded by reputation and by chance, possibly more out of the other riders kind of giving up than the reality that he was much stronger."

Hinault's former team manager Cyrille Guimard said in an interview with *l'Équipe* that what set Hinault apart was his 'normal' background (Hinault's parents were railworkers, his son now runs a bike shop) that provided him with motivation to outgrow his humble roots and allowed the French public to connect with him on a very fundamental level.

It was undoubtedly part of Hinault's appeal. These days France's two best Grand Tour riders, Thibaut Pinot and Romain Bardet, are urbane, well educated and conscientious; more like 'the Professor' Laurent Fignon than the Badger. Somehow they just don't seem

to have struck the same chord that Hinault strummed loudly for a decade.

"Bernard Hinault never got used to being beaten. He was always more a winner than a loser, as you say," Mangeas explains. "Psychologically he was the strongest. He was unstoppable, in his own little world, busy thinking about thumping each and every one of his opponents.

"Even if he wasn't the best physically, he was still the best in his head. And it was the head of Bernard Hinault that made all the difference."

A Frenchman may win the Tour again one day but 30 years and counting is a long time to wait. Until then, the French will have to make do with memories of 1985, the year when Hinault joined the top tier of professional cycling, cementing himself as one of the all time greats of the sport.

French future

The next Badger?

It's much harder for a Frenchman to win the Tour in 2015 than it was in 1985. Statistically, in an international peloton, French riders made up less than 25 per cent of this year's Tour start-sheet. While Thibaut Pinot and Jean-Christophe Péraud came relatively close in 2014, many observers believe that France's best hopes could lie with another Breton: Warren Barguil. Aged 23, the lanky climber on German team Giant-Alpecin won two stages in the 2013 Vuelta a España and finished 14th in his debut Tour this year. However, it's his coolness and ability to deal with pressure that augurs well for the future of French cycling. "I don't want to say it's fire," his team DS Rudi Kemna told *Cycle Sport*. "But you can see the passion in his eyes."

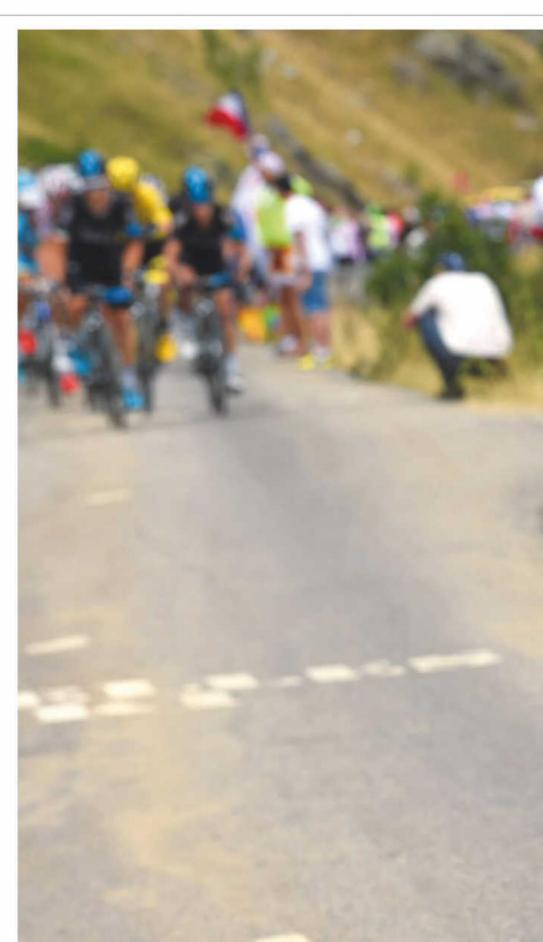


Quintana attacks on the final mountain Stage 20

Everyone was waiting for it to happen, including Chris Froome and the rest of Team Sky. Nairo Quintana is recognised as the best mountain climber in the peloton, and with the penultimate stage finishing at the top of Alpe d'Huez it was a question of when, not if, the Colombian would attack.

What we didn't know at the time was that Chris Froome was struggling with a chest infection. His team went into the final stage on edge, knowing that it would be a big task for him to hold on. As everyone else thought they were watching a procession toward Paris, Sky's management were looking at the worst case scenario. A 2.30 buffer feasibly could be wiped out on a 16km climb, and had the final stage been longer, who knows what damage Quintana could have done?

In the end, Froome held on, losing 1.20 to Quintana, as he climbed the mountain glued to team-mate Richie Porte's wheel.





LE TOUR IN BRIEF

The greatest race on Earth is over for another year, having been dominated again by a Brit — much to the chagrin of the host nation. Reason enough, then, to relive it over eight pages

Words Stephen Puddicombe Photos Graham Watson, Yuzuru Sunada, Cor Vos, Offside/L'Equipe





STAGE TWO: UTRECHT > ZEELAND

Crosswinds shake up race

Etixx-Quick Step did the equivalent of pulling off a bank robbery only to crash the getaway car, prematurely releasing Mark Cavendish for the sprint, allowing André Greipel to win the stage and Fabian Cancellara to edge into third. This earned the Swiss enough bonus seconds to move into the overall lead instead of Tony Martin. Cue a Twitter-storm accusing Cav of selfishness for sitting up before

reaching the line, as if in the heat of a bunch sprint he was capable of calculating all of the scenario's intricacies.

the first and second peloton

That bunch sprint was contested by a depleted peloton after crosswinds tore the race into pieces, leading to a very good day for Chris Froome, ove Alberto Contador and Tejay van Garderen, who all made it into the fronting group, and a bad day for pretty much every other GC contender.

STAGE THREE: ANTWERP > HUY

Huge crash claims Cancellara

Even your mates at work who don't know their bidons from their bonifications heard about the dramatic crashes that forced

The number of riders who abandoned following the crashes

this stage to be temporarily neutralised. The major favourites made it through unscathed, but race leader Fabian Cancellara was less fortunate, fracturing two vertebrae. That left Chris Froome as new overall leader after he stormed up the Mur de Huy to finish second behind Joaquim Rodríguez, claiming useful seconds over his rivals in the process. And a glum Tony Martin found himself foiled by a Brit yet again, as his battling ride fell just one second short of finally putting himself in yellow.





two on the cobbled stage last year

STAGE FOUR: SERAING > CAMBRAI

Stalemate on the cobbles

Vincenzo Nibali must have been the only rider to have frowned upon opening the curtains in the morning to a blue sky. The lack of rain, as well as a headwind, ensured that there was to be no repeat of the carnage that characterised last year's cobbled stage, and as such, all the GC riders finished together. All,

that is, apart from Thibaut Pinot, who endured a nightmare of recurring mechanical problems to lose 3.23. But there was better news for Tony Martin,

whose solemn expression finally burst into a grin of delight as he crossed the line first after a late solo attack to win the stage, finally claiming yellow in the process.

STAGE FIVE: ARRAS > AMIENS

Greipel beats Cav again

When, during the run-in to the Tour, André Greipel appeared in a video rapping about how 'The Tour is not a joke, it's a big, big race / And Da Gorilla he will show you how to make the pace', perhaps we should have resisted our instinctive reaction to point and laugh, and instead have taken him dead seriously. He

Number of broken ribs Michael Matthews rode the stage with

again won the bunch sprint, leaving in his wake a disconsolate Mark Cavendish, who for a second successive sprint appeared to make his move too early. Still, others had worse days — Nacer Bouhanni's debut Tour came to a premature end as he crashed out at the start of proceedings, while Michael Matthews endured a day of suffering at the back of the race, fighting against the pain of the injuries sustained two days before.



STAGE SIX: ABBEVILLE > LE HAVRE

Yellow jersey crashes out

We're not sure what Tony Martin did before the Tour, but his bad luck continued this week. Having overcome previous misfortune to finally get into vellow, the German crashed and broke his collarbone on the finishing straight after just two days as leader of the race. There were no attacks among the favourites — that is, not in the familiar sense of the word. Nibali hurled a bidon at Froome after both fell in the incident that claimed Martin, while Zdenek Stybar took advantage of the disruption to break clear

and win the stage.





STAGE EIGHT: RENNES > MUR-DE-BRETAGNE

First win for French

Having seen their star climber Pinot distanced and their star sprinter Bouhanni abandon, the French finally had something to celebrate: Ag2r domestique Alexis Vuillermoz rode away from everyone to win on the Mûr-de-Bretagne. In second was Dan Martin, whose Cannondale-Garmin team did the donkey work earlier in the stage only to be absent when the Irishman found himself out of position in the finale. Froome again rode from the front, while fourth was enough to see Sagan usurp Greipel as wearer of the green jersey.





STAGE NINE: VANNES > PLUMELEC

Tinkoff, Astana lose time

BMC lived up to their billing as world team time trial champions by winning the stage ahead of Sky and Movistar, putting van Garderen into second place overall. The American then claimed the 'fab four' should be expanded to include him, citing questionable logic: "The Backstreet Boys had five". Meanwhile, Contador lost his biggest chunk of time as Tinkoff-Saxo finished 28sec off the pace and Nibali slipped to 2.22 down on GC as his team-mates seemed to race against each other.



STAGE 10: TARBES > LA PIERRE-SAINT-MARTIN

Froome blows everyone away

Following a rest day of scandals about parking and power data, which essentially amounted to accusing Sky of being both impolite and very fast, the British team proceeded to tighten their stranglehold on the race with an impolite and very fast ride. No one could respond when Froome attacked with 6.5km to go, and the time gaps at the finish line were devastating; van Garderen lost 2.30, Contador 2.51, Nibali an

Number of British riders in the top seven on the stage

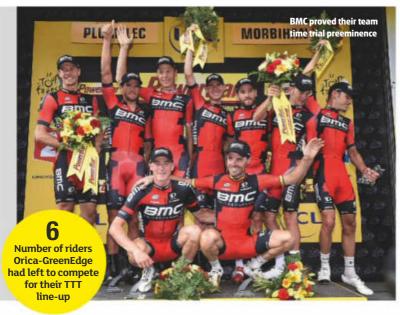
insurmountable 4.25, and even Quintana, who limited his losses to just over a minute, suffered the indignity of losing second place to Sky's domestique Richie Porte. And FDJ boss Marc Madiot's solo rendition of 'La Marseillaise' was not enough to rescue a miserable Bastille Day for the French as each television cut to the back of the peloton revealed yet another of their young stars being dropped.



STAGE 11: PAU > CAUTERETS

Majka resists Martin's surge

After Contador's time losses and the news of Ivan Basso's testicular cancer diagnosis, Rafael Majka helped **Gap that Dan Martin** improve the mood in the Tinkoff-Saxo managed to bridge camp by riding to victory via an attack from the peloton to on the Tourmalet. However, had the breakaway runner-up Dan Martin made the group original break with the Pole instead of having to bridge the gap on the Col d'Aspin, perhaps the win would have been his instead. Meanwhile Alexander Vinokourov's credentials as a motivational speaker took a hit after he said, "Vincenzo needs a good mechanic because something is broken in his head," before the Italian lost yet more time. Warren Barguil put in an impressive, cattle-dodging descent to limit his losses.





Sky neutralise rivals' attacks

Like a very slow game of whack-a-mole, cautious attacks kept popping up on the Plateau de Beille from Nibali, Contador, Valverde and Quintana, only for Froome - with help from Porte and an increasingly brilliant Geraint Thomas — to thwart each one. All the top six on

GC finished together, but there were at least signs that Froome's rivals were not willing to throw in the towel just yet. Joaquim Rodríguez was the strongest in the break, and claimed his second stage

STAGE 13: MURET > RODEZ

Sagan misses out again

When perennial runners-up **Greg Van Avermaet and** Sagan sprinted to the finish line together, for a moment it felt as if the balance of the whole universe had suddenly been plunged into doubt. Surely they couldn't both finish second? Ultimately it was the Belgian who broke the voodoo by crossing the line first, while Sagan was left "not sad, but pissed". The work from his Tinkoff-Saxo team on a swelteringly hot day was, however, not in vain; by dropping Greipel on an earlier climb, Sagan was able to extend his lead





STAGE 14: RODEZ > MENDE

Cummings defeats French duo

Steve Cummings surged past French climbers Pinot and Bardet just as the day's final climb plateaued 1km from the finish, and held on to a lead of just a few bike-lengths all the way to the finish line to take an unlikely victory.

Meanwhile Froome became the target of attacks — first from a spectator dousing him in urine while accusing him of doping, then from Quintana. Though he managed to pace back up to the Colombian, others lost significant time,

and gaps on GC that had the day before resembled the price of

a pint in your average
British town (2.52 for van
Garderen, 4.04 for
Contador) now looked
closer to the price of a
pint in London (3.32 for
van Garderen, 4.23 for
Contador).

STAGE 15: MENDE > VALENCE

Greipel dominates sprint again

Greipel held off John Degenkolb and
Alexander Kristoff to make it three
bunch sprints out of four in
Valence, after a diarrhoeastricken Cavendish dropped out
of contention right at the start of
the stage. Sagan was only

fourth, but comfortably held on to the green jersey by a substantial 44 points having made it into the day's break and earned the maximum points at the intermediate sprint. It would take more than a minor rule change to stop this irrepressible Slovak's winning green.

Greipel is the in-form sprinter at the Tour

Greipel is the in-form sprinter at the Tour

Greipel is the in-form sprinter at the Tour

STAGE 16: BOURG-DE-PEAGE > GAP

Geraint Thomas headbutts lamppost

Warren Barguil did nothing to temper French-Anglo antagonism at this Tour — further fuelled after reporter Matt Rendall quizzed France TV's Laurent Jalabert about his somewhat hypocritical insinuations about Froome's performances — as he forced Geraint Thomas into a ditch via a telegraph pole on the descent of the Col de Manse. Ruben Plaza won the stage after he attacked the rest of a 23-man breakaway on the Col de Manse, but yet again it was Sagan who was centre of attention as he hurtled down the descent with breathtaking speed in pursuit of the Lampre rider, only to finish 30 seconds behind and in second place yet again.





Froome and Quintana may have again reached the finish line side-by-side, but elsewhere the race was blowing to pieces. First van Garderen (third overnight) was forced to abandon sick; then Contador (fifth overnight) — who had

earlier tried and failed to ambush the yellow jersey with an attack — crashed on the Col d'Allos descent, losing two minutes on GC and falling behind Thomas.

Simon Geschke took a brilliant stage win, attacking

from far out while the rest of the 28-man break were watching each other, then riding alone over two big climbs and one treacherous descent (on which his nearest challenger Thibaut Pinot crashed) to victory.



Bardet cheers up French

A Tour of disappointment for Bardet — not to mention the French public — was transformed in one swashbuckling attack. The 24-year-old took off at the top of the fearsome Col de Glandon and built a big enough lead on the subsequent descent to win the stage half a minute ahead of Pierre Rolland, move into the top 10 overall and become joint leader of the mountains classification. With the favourites offering only tentative attacks, of more interest was the picturesque hairpins of the Lacets de Montvernier, and the moment Jacob Fuglsang was up-ended by a TV moto.







STAGE 19: SAINT-JEAN-DE-MAURIENNE > LA TOUSSUIRE

Thomas dropped, Froome survives

The fat lady was rudely interrupted from breaking into song as Froome fought through his most perilous day at the Tour. He was isolated on the day's first climb, with even the erstwhile indomitable Geraint Thomas unable to match the frantic pressure applied by Nibali. The Italian was again the perpetrator later on the Glandon as he attacked just as

the yellow jersey suffered a mechanical
— "unsportsmanlike" in Froome's
words, but *CS* is willing to let that slide
given the panache with which last
year's winner rode the rest of the

22
minutes lost by
Geraint
Thomas

60km to win. Movistar were
less proactive, but Quintana
did manage to drop the
yellow jersey when he
eventually attacked on the
final climb.



STAGE 21: SEVRES > PARIS CHAMPS-ELYSEES

Greipel makes it four

Greipel was the only sprinter not to look completely exhausted on the Champs-Elysées finishing straight. He put the icing on the cake of a perfect Tour by winning the most prestigious sprint of them all. Perhaps the most tired of all was Cavendish, who couldn't find the legs to

10 number of Tour stage wins in Greipel's career

challenge the German for the win, and finished down in sixth. Fortunately the men's race was not marred by the treacherous wet conditions that disrupted La Course earlier — the women's race was won by Anna van der Breggen following a bold solo attack 6km from the finish.









Champs-Elysées sprint Stage 21

The 2015 edition of the Tour de France was not one for the sprinters. The parcours included climbs and cobbles in the first week, followed by high mountains and smaller climbs for the last two weeks. Five stages culminated with a bunch, or group sprint, of which André Greipel won four, against just one for Mark Cavendish. It was the best stage haul for the 33-year-old German and, aside from Marcel Kittel, he did it against the best sprinters in the world. The icing on his strudel was a win on the Champs-Elysées (left) — the stage known as 'the sprinters' world championship'





Tour de France 2014

OFFICIAL RACE REVIEW DVD

Cobbles, crashes and a new campione: the 2014 Tour de France proved to be one of the most dramatic editions of the race in recent years.

While pre-race favourites Chris Froome – the defending champion – and Alberto Contador both crashed out, Astana's Vincenzo Nibali rode flawlessly to become Italy's first Tour champion since 1998.

Nibali led the race for all but two days, and produced four dominant stage victories on the road to Paris. His first came on stage two in Sheffield, which formed part of the spectacular Grand Départ in Yorkshire and attracted millions of people to the roadside.

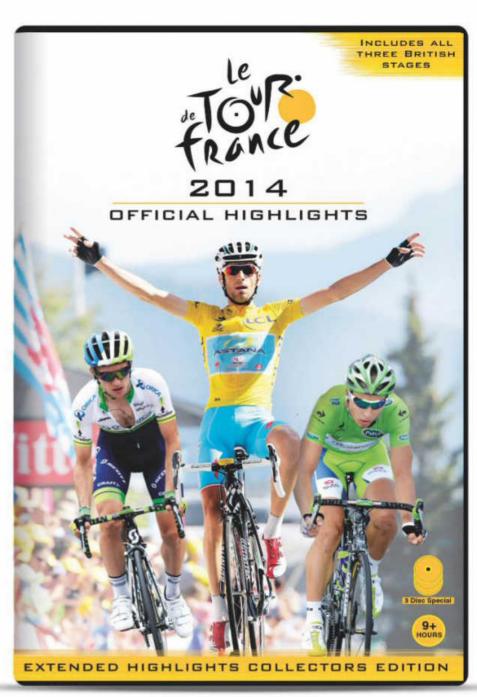
Not even the race's inclusion of some of the famed cobble sectors from the iconic Paris-Roubaix one-day race on stage five could slow him down, and when the race hit the mountains he was unstoppable.

Elsewhere, France found new heroes in Jean Christophe Péraud, Thibaut Pinot Romain Bardet and Tony Gallopin, and the likes of Matteo Trentin, Rafal Majka and Ramunas Navardauskas all won thrilling stages.

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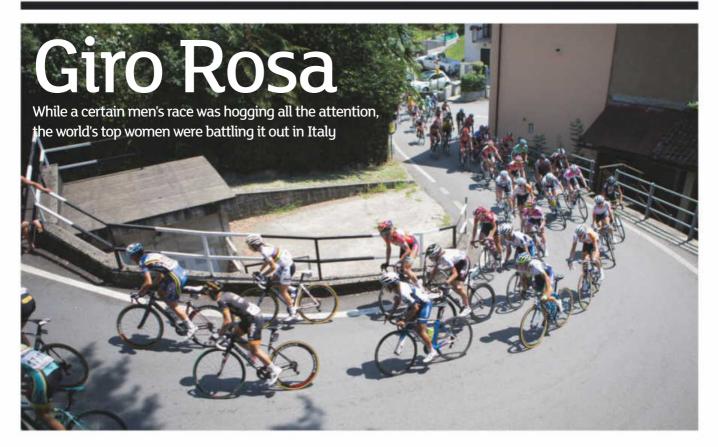






RACINGDIGEST

Anna van der Breggen fills Marianne Vos's cycling shoes with a stunning win at the Giro Rosa; Emma Johansson times it perfectly in Germany; and the Tour of Belgium serves up a cosmopolitan mix of talent



hough it can struggle for attention because it clashes with the men's Tour de France, the 10-day length and a mixture of flat, mountainous and time-trial stages ensures that the Giro Rosa remains one of the most prestigious and entertaining races on the women's calendar.

This year's race boiled down to a battle between the three strongest teams: Boels-Dolmans with Megan Guarnier, Wiggle-Honda with Mara Abbott, and eventual winner Anna van der Breggen, who led Rabo-Liv in the absence of 2014 champion Marianne Vos.

Rabo-Liv made their strength clear as early as the first day in Slovenia, when they placed three riders (Roxane Knetemann, Ellen van Dijk and van der Breggen herself) in the top four of the prologue, though all missed out on the stage

win to Bigla's specialist Annemiek van Vleuten.

The team promptly made up for that disappointment by inheriting the pink jersey the following day through Lucinda Brand, whose bonus points for finishing second in the bunch sprint behind Italian Barbara Guarischi were enough to move into the overall lead.

Eight-strong break

Stage two saw a group of eight riders put nearly two minutes into the rest of the field. Guarnier defeated van der Breggen by the narrowest of margins in a sprint for the line, to take both the stage win and the overall lead.

Following three successive runner-up finishes, Rabo-Liv finally landed a stage the day after, courtesy of Brand, who won the sprint from a nine-woman break, featuring no genuine

threats on the GC. On the flat stage four Annalisa Cucinotta claimed a win in the inevitable bunch sprint.

An uphill finish on stage five promised GC action, but no significant time gaps accrued; all of the favourites finished together. Victory came from an attack 2km from the finish by world champion Pauline Ferrand-Prévot. This was her biggest win in the rainbow stripes to date. Guarnier's pink jersey was put under more pressure the following day when she was dropped after an attack from third overall Ashleigh Moolman, but recovered to finish in a dozen-strong group of favourites, 24 seconds behind solo stage winner Mayuko Hagiwara.

There were more significant time gaps on the mountainous terrain of stage seven, but a group of six favourites including pink jersey holder Guarnier, second overall Moolman and the eventual winner van der Breggen all finished together. Brand, however, managed to slip away on the final climb and extend her lead on the descent to win her second stage of the race, while Guarnier won the sprint for second for a third consecutive stage, gaining a few more bonus seconds in the process.

Breggen brilliance

Those minor gains were to be put into perspective the following day, however, as van der Breggen made her move on the GC with a brilliant victory in the individual time trial. Over the course of just 21.7km she gained over a minute on all of her rivals, including 1.03 over runner-up Guariner — enough for the Dutchwoman to move into the overall lead by 46 seconds. That left van der Breggen and her Rabo-Liv team with just one day to defend the pink jersey, and the final stage, featuring a 13km climb to the finish, was arguably the most difficult in the entire race.

Indeed, van der Breggen was put under pressure as Wiggle-Honda's Mara Abbott (two-time former winner and GC threat at only 2.29 down) attacked on the final climb. The American's attack was enough to earn her the stage win and second overall ahead of Guarnier, but van der Breggen was able to rely on her domestiques to protect her and limit her losses, and ultimately and seal the overall victory.

Following victories at both Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and La Flèche Wallonne in the spring, the pink jersey continues an excellent season. Van der Breggen, 25, has shone in the absence of compatriot and team leader Marianne Vos this season and, if she can continue riding as strongly, may soon be pushing for outright leadership of the team.

Zabel comes of age

Rick Zabel, 21, claimed his first victory as a pro with a stage win at the Tour of Austria. At the same age, his father Erik had yet to turn professional.

How Emma Johansson won Thüringen Rundfahrt der Frauen

Doesn't lose any significant time and finishes in the group of favourites in the opening two stages, despite feeling below-par.

Finishes sixth in the time trial, limiting her

losses to 41 seconds behind the winner and new overall leader Lisa Brennauer.

Whittles down
Brennauer's lead by
winning the sprint for second
in the following two stages,
and claims bonus seconds.

Forms a breakaway group ahead of Brennauer on the final stage.

5 Attacks that group relentlessly, drops other GC threat Lauren Stephens, and finishes second to claim the overall win.

Did you know? Vincenzo Nibali and Alejandro Valverde's victories in the National Championships mean that, for the first time since 1992, both the Italian and Spanish road champion are Grand Tour winners t under abbott great at only mb. The am her the lof Guarnier, yo on her ther losses

Whatever happened to...

Mattia Gavazzi Having emerged as a promising young sprinter with loads of wins in small races in 2009, Gavazzi fell off the radar upon testing positive for cocaine. Turns out he's being riding for the Danish Christina Watches-Dana team this season, and caught our eye by winning four stages at the Tour of Qinghai Lake.

Moreno Moser When Moreno (nephew of Francesco) Moser won the Tour of Poland in 2012 at the age of 21, and Strade-Bianche the year after, we thought he was a superstar in the making. But the Italian appeared to vanish into thin air last year— until he resurfaced this month to win the final stage of the Tour of Austria.

Tour of Austria

Few races this season have been as international as the Tour of Austria, which threw up eight different nationalities of winner across three continents in its nine stages, and had a representative from America (Brent Bookwalter) and Africa (Natnael Berhane) in its GC top five. The more traditional cycling heartlands of Spain and Belgium produced first (Victor de la Parte) and second (Ben Hermans), while Czech Republic's Jan Hirt was third.



The month ahead... Tour of Poland

Poland's home tour looks set to be a showdown between Rafal Majka and Michal Kwiatkowski

his year's Tour of Poland gets underway with the sport in that country in arguably stronger health than ever. In Rafal Majka and Michal Kwiatkowski, they boast two of the brightest young stars in the peloton, both of whom look set to compete head-to-head for the title of their home nation's major race.

In the space of the last 12 months or so, the pair have been among those prominent in world cycling, giving a nation lacking in great cycling heritage a hugely increased presence. Some of the sport's most recognisable prizes have been won by the pair recently: Majka won the polka-dot jersey at last year's Tour, and Kwiatkowski has been donning the rainbow stripes of world champion this season having won the road race in Ponferrada last year.

Prior to their breakthrough,
Polish cyclists had done little on the
professional scene, with Zenon Jaskula's
ride in the 1993 Tour de France – where
he finished on the podium and took a
stage in the Pyrenees – the standout
achievement in the modern era.

Before the fall of the Soviet empire, Poles had achieved some success in the Eastern amateur scene, especially through Ryszard Szurkowski, who won four editions of The Peace Race in the 1970s. Known as the 'Tour de France of the East', the Peace Race was a prestigious event in its own right, but as an amateur, Szurkowski never got to test himself against the best riders in the world at the Tour de France.

Majka and Kwiatkowski, by contrast, both put in some eye-catching performances at the Tour last month. Majka won a stage with an attack on one of the Tour's most famous climbs, the Col du Tourmalet, and enters this year's Tour of Poland as defending champion, having enjoyed an extraordinary purple patch of form this time last year. First he claimed two mountains stages at the Tour as well as the mountains classification, and went on to also win consecutive uphill finishes and the overall in Poland.

Pole to Pole

Kwiatkowski will show off his rainbow stripes in front of home crowds, having skipped the race last year, and does so on the back of successful season. He won as early in March in the opening time trial of Paris-Nice, and went on to finish second overall at that race, win

Amstel Gold, and embark on several breaks at the Tour.

Both enter this year's Tour of Poland with a realistic chance of winning, although the route does seem to play more to Kwiatkowski's strengths.

Following three flat stages during which the sprinters will take prominence, stages four, five and six all feature the kind of short, steep hills and lengthy distances that characterise the Ardennes Classics that the world champion excels in. Even the final stage in Krakow, a 25km individual time trial, looks like an opportunity for him to gain time.

Majka would probably prefer longer mountain passes than these shorter passes – although, that said, his overall victory last year did come on a similar route. His victory on that route was founded first on winning an uphill sprint against his GC rivals, then attacking on the following day's summit finish, before defending his overall lead in the final time trial. The final three stages in this year's edition are similar, so a repeat performance could be in the offing.

Whatever the result, with such talented riders returning to perform in front of and inspire young fans, the future looks bright for Polish cycling.



Had a Tour to forget? Come ride La Vuelta!

Either through individual choice or as punishment by angry team managers, every year the Vuelta attracts a flock of big names who flunked their main season's goal of doing well at the Tour. Here's who we can expect to see at the start line at Puerto Banus on August 22:

Vincenzo Nibali: Having failed to defend his Tour title and not really done much all year, Nibali might be in the mood to save his season with a GC bid at the Vuelta. Though we're not sure how well his presence would go down among teammates Mikel Landa and Fabio Aru, who might have expected to lead

Thibaut Pinot:

When the French starlet last endured a crisis of confidence at the 2013 Tour, he bounced back at the Vuelta with seventh overall. Here's hoping he can do the same again.



Joaquim Rodriguez: OK, so obviously winning two stages hardly constitutes a bad Tour de France, but in terms of GC 'Purito' was nowhere expect that to be the Vuelta, where the Spaniard has finished in the top four in three

consecutive editions.

Fabian Cancellara: What Tour ended in pain, as the Swiss veteran crashed out after just one day in the yellow jersey, which he might otherwise have

expected to keep it for the whole first there's a nice-looking flat time trial in the last week of the Vuelta for

Tejay van Garderen: If the American can recover the unfortunately timed sickness podium, he could be one of the to win the Vuelta.

INSTANT EXPERT

SPARKASSEN

The one-day race takes place in Bochum, Germany on Sunday August 2, and takes the peloton on several circuits through the city.

2 It is the sevenumes and Women's World Cup, currently It is the seventh leg of the led by Lizzie Armitstead following her victory at the Philadelphia Cycling Classic in June. She has Wiggle-Honda's Flanders winner Elisa Borghini and the in-form Anna van der Breggen breathing down her neck.

The race typicany bunch sprint, although in both The race typically boils down to a 2010 and 2011 a group of half a dozen or so riders sprinted for victory, with Ellen Van Dijk and Adrie Visser coming out on top respectively.

Last year, Marianne Vos (who else) took the victory, sprinting out of the last, tight right-hand bend at the front of the bunch, comfortably retaining her lead to hold off Giorgia Bronzini and Lotta Lepisto by a good bike's length.





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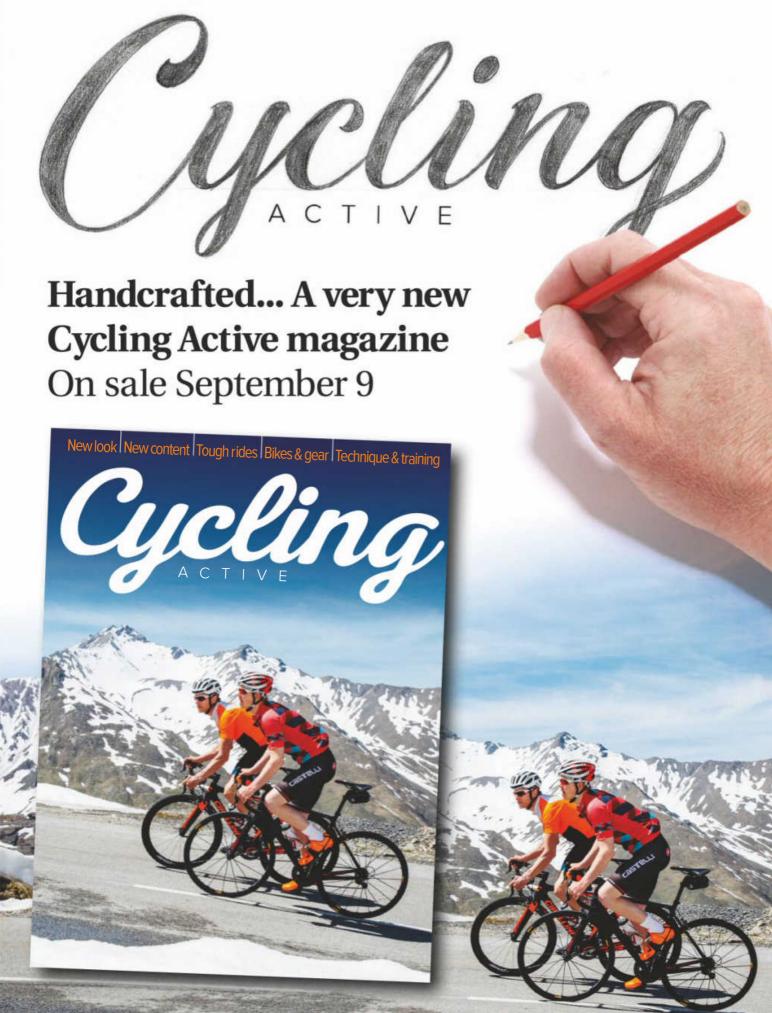






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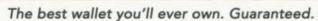
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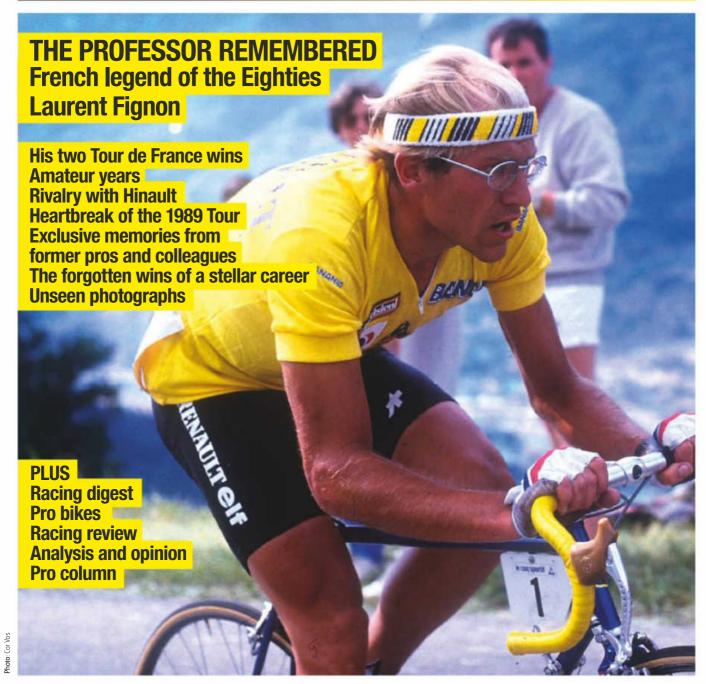
EURIO)VISION



Peter Sagan jumps for joy having taken the lead of the points classification after the arduous 181km stage eight. Following a brief tussle for supremacy with André Greipel over the next few stages, Sagan stamped his authority in the Alps to secure his fourth consecutive green jersey. Numerous podium girls were rumoured to be relieved and very happy at the Slovak's new style of celebration.

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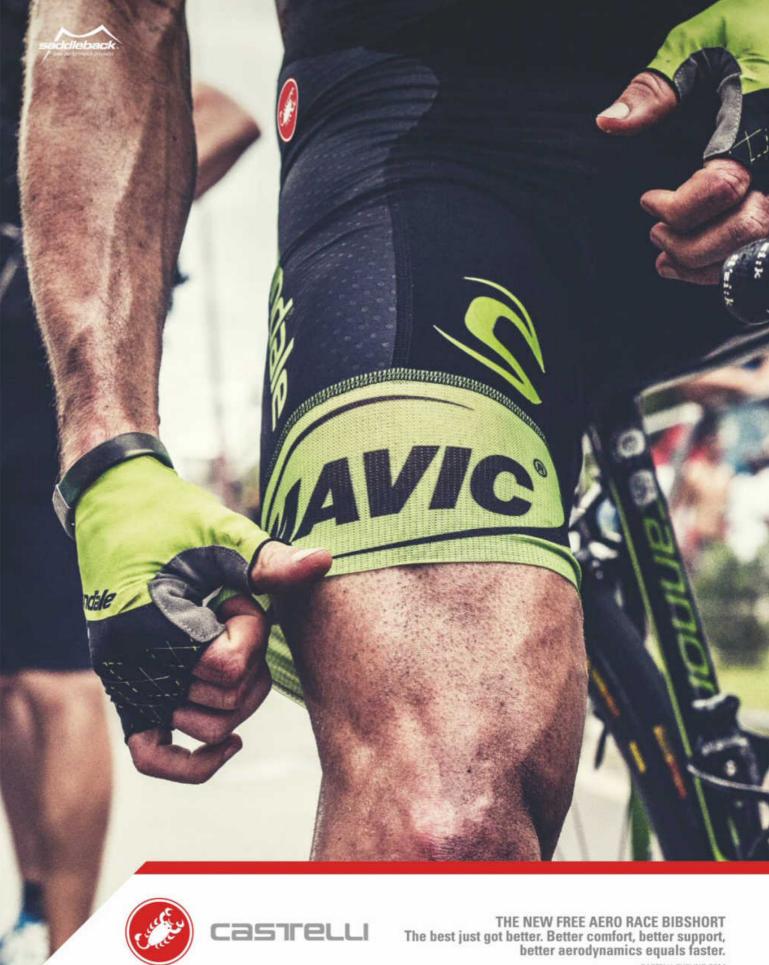
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